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December 16, 1879.

No. 5. VOL. I.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS, 98 WILLIAM ST., N. Y.

PRICE, 5 CENTS.



A WILD CRY BURST FROM BESSIE'S LIPS AS SHE SAW THE WICKED, SINISTER FACE OF "BLACK PHIL" AT THE OPEN WINDOW.

Bessie Raynor, the Work Girl; OR, THE Quicksands of Life.

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CHAPTER I.

A FACE AT THE WINDOW.

"BESSIE! Bessie! I say, Bessie, my child!" and the old man's voice, as he turned uneasily on his lowly bed, went out in a pitiful wail.

"Here, father; I am here," and the frail young girl, with a wan, haggard face, suddenly aroused from the little slumber into which she had fallen, and, rising from her chair, reeled, rather than walked, to the couch of the sufferer.

At that instant the dim-lit room was ablaze with a blinding flash of

lightning, which revealed every object, as if with the splendor of the noonday sun. A moment, and the crashing, jarring collapse of the air, as the bolt came down, rattled the casement and the rickety doors of old Silas Raynor's humble house.

The girl started back, as she flung her hands to her eyes to shut out the blinding glare. Then she turned abruptly toward the open window to let down the uplifted sash.

But the old man saw her.

"Stop, Bessie," he said. "Let the air come in, my child. I'll not need it much longer. Let me have it. Do not fear the lightning or the thunder; the gust will soon pass over, and God, who has watched over us heretofore so well, will not let harm befall us now. Ha!" he exclaimed, after a slight pause, as again the red-winged lightning flared into the room, illuminating every nook and corner, and quickly followed by the sharp, pealing stroke.

That lurid glare, blinding and more dazzling than the first, though it was but momentary in its stay, showed a scene in the humble apartment.

Bessie Raynor, startled and awe-struck, her long auburn ringlets falling in disarray down her back, her thin, frail figure, weak and exhausted, staggering away before the blinding stroke, her delicate, vein-marked hands pressed over the lack-luster, tear-red eyes, was a striking figure in that scene.

An old man, with gray locks scattered over his aged head, with a weather-beaten, iron-like, yet gentle face, his big gray eyes glancing quietly above and around him, lay upon the humble bed, with its poverty-speaking appointments. Occasionally he tremblingly raised his hand to his forehead to wipe away the cold dew gathering there so rapidly.

But his right hand nor his right leg did he move, and the muscles of the right side of his face were fearfully contracted; the deformity thus created about the mouth and cheek was hideous.

This old man formed another figure in this impressive scene.

His name was Silas Raynor—"Captain Silas," as he was known in Lawrence, and in Newburyport, and all along the coast-country. And for many a year he had been known; for on this wild, gusty night in August of the year 1859, this very day, he had reached his sixty-fifth birthday.

Four days previous to this stormy summer night of lightning and thunder, when, near sunset, he was strolling leisurely over the eastern bridge and listening to the loud roar of the Merrimac, as its dark waters thundered over the dam, thinking of his gentle daughter, Bessie, and his crippled boy, Ross, who were at work in the great Pemberton mill, the clack and whirl of its flying shuttles and spindles even then falling on his ear; thinking, too, of his long-absent son, the sailor on the northern seas, whose brown cheek and hardy brow were facing the Arctic winds, the old man had paused and staggered toward the low, red parapet. A sudden faintness had crept over him; then a sense of numbness had crawled slowly, coldly, up from his feet and settled in his strong brain. Then a deadening tingling had flashed through his limbs, and with a deep sigh he had tottered backward from the parapet and fallen upon the boarded floor of the bridge.

When he had recovered his consciousness, a great crowd of men and women, of boys and girls, were gathered around him. The factories had "let out," for the day's work was done.

Old Silas was securely grasped in the strong arms of Lorin Gray, the operative, and, on either side, as he slowly reeled along, supported by the mill-man, toward his humble home in the narrow alley-way near the canal, walked Bessie Raynor and Ross, the cripple, weeping bitterly and wringing their hands.

When the doctor, hastily summoned, had come, only a cursory examination was sufficient to make him shake his head and whisper in Lorin Gray's ear that the end was not far off.

Yet Silas Raynor was, bodily, the impersonation of seeming health.

This, then, was the fourth night that Bessie had sat up and watched by the bedside of her father, sleeping only at intervals as he slept, always heeding his slightest cry and driving away her tears to make him think she was brave. Besides this, she did not stop her loom in the mill, but all these four days had worked half of the time regularly and steadily. Then she had hurried home to attend to her father.

Ross, however, cripple though he was, had not missed an hour from his daily toil.

The Raynors could not afford to lose an hour even from work. 'Tis true that it had been hinted that the old captain could afford to take his children out of the mill and relieve them of the constant labor to which they were subjected. It was hinted that he certainly owned the house, an humble one, truly, yet a house, in which he lived. It was hinted, too, that the old captain had, in years ago, purchased some western property in Illinois for a song; and then came the strangest hint of all, that the old ex-mariner, who had sailed in his youth in foreign seas, had amassed money in queer, outlandish gold.

That gold he had buried!

Yet these were but hints; and those who knew the old man discredited them, for they were well aware of his love for his children.

At all events, Bessie and her crippled brother worked still, in the manner we have stated, in the Pemberton mill. If they stopped for any cause, sickness or accident included, their pay ceased until they reported again for duty. The proprietor could not afford to create a precedent of this sort!

Lorin Gray had come regularly to the humble dwelling to inquire after the old man. His visits had been made after his work was over; he, too, could not leave the mill. On his first visit, after the accident, he had unhesitatingly offered to remain all night and let Bessie go to bed. But the girl, with a blush—though she glanced gratefully into the sad, handsome face of the young man—had declined his offer, with thanks.

There was a relationship existing between the two, of which both were aware, which made Bessie decline Lorin Gray's offer. He did not press it. But he came again the next night, and, as he saw her worn, wan look, her dim, sleepless eye, he again offered his services as watcher. But again Bessie refused, and this time, though her tone was decided and her words admitted of no further reply, her blush was more marked.

As the second flash of lightning glared in the room, Bessie uttered a shriek and reeled toward a chair for support.

"Oh, father!" she cried, "'tis dangerous! You are in the draught! Let me close the window, for—"

"No no, my child," interrupted the old man, speaking with difficulty, anxiety in his tone. I must intrust to you a secret, this—"

"A secret, father!"

"Ay, my child, and this night, or never, you must have it! Let the air come in. I dread not the lightning-stroke; if it be the Master's will that it should be thus, I care not. I am going now, fast!"

"Oh, father! do not speak so. You will recover, and—"

"No, my child, I know better. I can read what the doctor thinks, in his eyes and manner, and Lorin Gray would not deceive me. He has not spoken a word of hope to me yet. No, Bessie, build not up false hopes. Before the mid-watch, old Silas Raynor will have slipped his cable forever!"

Bessie Raynor sunk into the chair, and, burying her face in her hands wept silent, bitter tears. It was strange that the fountains were not long since drained.

The old father turned his head with an effort; his eyes fell upon his daughter. A shiver passed over his frame; he strove to straighten, but the strong hand of palsy held him back.

"Come, Bessie," at length he resumed, speaking in a low tone, but hurriedly; "my sands are running out with the speeding hours. I must tell you the secret I referred to. Justice to you, and an eye to your future welfare and that of your brother, impel me to speak; and the time has come. Draw near, Bessie," and he beckoned his daughter to him.

Unhesitatingly the girl arose from her chair, wiped her eyes, and drew near the bed.

"First, Bessie, search in the old locker at the foot of the bed, and bring me the flask you will find. It contains pure Santa Cruz rum. I need it now, though I never used it. It will build me up, until I can tell you what I have to say."

The girl did as directed. In a few moments she had found the flask, and returning to the bedside, placed it to the lips of her father.

The old man drank greedily; then, leaning back on the pillow, closed his eyes. For a moment he lay thus; but, suddenly arousing himself, he turned toward the girl, motioned her to take a seat, and began to speak.

Bessie quietly slid her hand into the sweat-cold palm of her father, and leaning her head on her elbow, waited for him to proceed.

"I did not expect death so soon, my child," he said. "Four days ago I was strong and hearty, and counted on a dozen years more of life, in which to look around for my children. But death has come sooner than I thought—ay, death, my child! Had I known it I would have provided for you better; yet there is time. Listen, my child—"

"Ross, father, Ross. Had I not better call him?" interrupted the girl, half arising. "He sleeps just above, you know."

The old man hesitated; a shade of pain came to his brow and a tear dimmed his eye.

"No, no, Bessie," he said. "Poor boy! He works hard. Let him sleep. You can call him when—I have told you all; for then I'll soon be gone."

Bessie seated herself again, and once more sought with her own delicate fingers the hard, horny hand of her father.

The old man returned her warm pressure, and summoning his energies, began:

"I must hurry, Bessie; my strength is going again. Time now—death will wait for me. My daughter, we have been living here in our little home for years—been living happily, though surrounded, not exactly by poverty, but by scanty comforts. You and your brother have been compelled to work in the mill and toil day by day. Well, my child, you will never lose anything by learning to work; but, Bessie, my heart has often bled for you, and more than once have I been on the point of relieving you from your hard work—taking you from the mill."

"Relieving us, father? Taking us from the mill? What mean you, father?" and Bessie leaned over and looked anxiously, curiously, at her father's distorted face.

The old man half smiled at her eagerness, yet his smile was one of pleasure.

"I mean, my dear Bessie," he said in a low tone, yet speaking distinctly, "that I am able to take you from the mill, to dress you in fine clothes, and send you to the first schools in Massachusetts."

He paused.

The girl started back in amazement.

"You, you, father!" she exclaimed. "Oh, then, why have you not done it? Why have you kept us at the looms all this—"

"There, there, my child, do not distress me more. My time is flying, and I must soon be thinking of other matters. You must not misjudge me. I said I was able to take you from the mill, and I spoke the truth; but, my daughter, I have been hampered with fear. I have gold, but I dared not let you know it. I knew that it would be of more use to you after I was gone than while I was living. And I feared, too, that curious eyes might be fastened on the gold which my children should offer in trade. Then I knew, too, there are some unscrupulous ones in Lawrence, who would gladly clutch at any pretext for suspicion and for persecution."

The old man hesitated as he uttered the last words with significance, and his eyes rested on his daughter's face.

Bessie Raynor saw his glance, and she had noted his words and the emphasis he had made. A shudder crept over her thin frame, and she half-cowered away.

"I—I understand you, father, and your reasons for secrecy," she murmured; "I fear the man; but he is married, and I'll appeal to the law to—"

"But he swears he is not married, and the law is very slow at working sometimes, for—"

At that instant another flash lighted up the room, and the sashes rattled under the vibration of the reverberating thunder.

Bessie and her father both involuntarily turned their gaze toward the open window. A wild cry burst from Bessie's lips as she saw a stunted figure, with a wicked, sinister face there.

"Black Phil!" she cried, and sunk forward on the bed.

CHAPTER II.

GOLD AND STEEL.

Two hours before the occurrences as given in the preceding chapter, on this same sultry, gusty August night, the figure of a man might have been seen hurrying along Essex street.

Occasionally he cast his eyes aloft and furtively scanned the threatening sky, and noted the inky darkness in which the heavens were hid. Then he would redouble his pace. He sardoniously kept to the side on which the lamps were flared by the fitful, moaning summer wind, blowing in from the west; and, though the night was black and gloomy, and though the air, despite the rising gale, was hot and stifling, he drew a wide-rimmed hat over his eyes, and fastened his coat-collar well up around his neck.

That man was Arthur Ames, of the firm of Arlington and Ames, brokers and bankers, doing business on Essex street.

A quarter of an hour before we see him striding along Essex street, Arthur Ames had received a brief note. The contents of that note amounted to a summons. He was obeying the mandate.

On he hurried, seldom looking behind him, but, as we have said, occasionally timorously glancing at the ominous cloud-bank in the sky.

At last, at the intersection of a cross-street, he passed beneath a blazing lamp. The rays, which were flung wildly about in distorted flashes, fell on the old man's face and revealed it, pale, anxious and threatening.

Fifteen minutes from the time we first saw him, he passed before a low, solid, dingy-looking two-story house, the lower story embellished with a plate-glass window on either side of the narrow door. It seemed, indeed, that door had been sacrificed for *window*; yet this was a banking-house, and the owners might have had their reasons for the straitened entrances.

Arthur Ames paused here and glanced around him. There were few pedestrians abroad this night; not a soul was in sight.

"Black Phil is in earnest!" muttered the banker, with a suppressed anathema, as he gazed furtively in every direction. "And I, so completely in his power! Fiends! why did I trust him!"

He paused and fumbled in his pocket, as if searching for something.

"But I'll not hesitate now!" he suddenly exclaimed, as if acting under an impulse. "If money will buy Black Phil, and carry him away, it shall be done! If not, a sudden thrust, or powder and ball, must and shall save me. I'll borrow the money from the bank, and Malcolm Arlington will be none the wiser."

He drew from his pocket a key, and stepping back a few paces to a dark, solemn-looking door, which denoted the private entrance, inserted the key, cautiously, into the keyhole. There was a low, harsh rattling of the double bolts, a rapid shooting of bars, and the door opened.

A moment, and Arthur Ames had entered the dark passage and closed the door cautiously, yet securely, behind him.

Scarcely had he disappeared, before, as if from the shadows on the sidewalk, the figure of a tall man arose and slowly came into view. With a few deliberate strides he walked forward and paused at the private entrance of the banking-house.

A neighboring lamp on the opposite side of the street, at that instant, driven by the moaning gust which crept along, flashed its beams brightly forth for a fleeting instant and illumined the face of the tall man, who stood quietly by the side of the banking-house.

A singular face it was; hard, stern, calculating, brave, ambitious.

"I am armed, and it may be well that I am. Arthur Ames is a coward, afraid of his shadow, but, in such a matter as this, he may be desperate, for he holds every thing at stake! I would not have thought it. But now, my eyes are opened, and 'tis I, Arthur Ames, who hold you! At last you shall work for me!"

"Ah, Minerva! Minerva!" he continued; "I know you love me not, and that you do love the low-born Lorin Gray. Dream on, dream on; I'll not awaken you yet! I'll love and worship you, for you *must* be mine!"

He drew out a key, flung open his coat, so that he could readily thrust his hand in the side pocket, and softly opened the door.

At this same hour a light gleamed from the window of a small cabin, nestled close on the bank of the river, down on the waste-lands below the machine shops. It was an unpretending habitation, and stood all alone, and the light which flashed from the uncurtained window was small and unpretending, too; so faint, too, that its gleam did not penetrate many paces into the dark, glowering night-air outside. Within the room in which the light shone—and a mean, shabbily-furnished room it was—sat a man, leaning his hands upon a low table. On the table stood a rude inkstand, open, and near by lay several sheets of coarsely-scrawled and blurred paper. The lamp which flung out its rays was placed near the open window, and in front of the man upon whose face it shone.

That face was not one upon which the beholder would like to look twice.

The man's complexion was so swarthy that, in the uncertain light, it seemed almost black. The head

was massive, square and brutish, enormously large behind the ears and slanting over the low, wrinkled forehead. The brow was lowering with the matted masses of coarse red hair falling over it, even down to the eyes. Those eyes were small, piercing, sinister, and of an uncertain color, and they continually roved around restlessly beneath the shaggy brows, though the head was stationary. The lower part of the man's face was covered by a short, stunted beard of the same color as his hair, though the mustache did not conceal the large mouth with its thick, protruding lips, between which showed one or two brown, jagged, overhanging teeth.

The frame of this person corresponded in its mold to the beastly cast of features. It was short, brawny and absolutely deformed and distorted by the giant muscles which worked the limbs. The spread of the shoulders was immense, made more so by an unsightly hump on the left side of the back. One glance at his garb betrayed his calling. He was a mill operative.

He sat quietly for some moments, gazing at the blurred sheets and around the room.

At that instant a dazzling flash of lightning blazed through the open casement. Then followed the thunder. The man sprang to his feet and started to rush from the apartment; but he stayed his steps.

"No, no!" he muttered; "I have sent him word to come, and I must wait for him. I'll strengthen myself, and then I'll not care for the lightning, and the cabin is low, too. Yes, I'll stay; for I want money, and I want to see Arthur Ames."

As he spoke, he turned and went to a large chest in the further corner of the room. He raised the lid thrust in his hand, and drew out a black bottle, from which he took a long draught. Then, replacing the bottle, he returned to his seat near the window. Several moments elapsed, and he spoke not.

"Ha! ha!" he cried, "now I am strong. I care not for the elements now; I care not for the black shadows which haunt me; for the shade which lurks at my elbow; for the childish wail that continually comes up from old Merrimac! No, I care for nothing save gold, and for Bessie Raynor. That girl is in my mind all the time. By force or love, she shall be mine. Now, Nancy"—here his voice sunk and his eyes flashed toward a door which led into another room—"what of her?"

As he spoke he arose. He cautiously approached the door, and bending his ear down, listened intently. But he heard nothing.

He crept softly over the floor, and paused near an old-fashioned, low mantle-piece. He glanced toward the door again, and then, turning resolutely away, placed his hand on the wall, in a certain spot, and pressed heavily.

Slowly a concealed door opened, revealing a cavity of considerable depth. In that cavity lay quietly a large, glistening heap of gold.

The man gloated over it. At that moment the door leading into the room from the other apartment slowly opened and a woman protruded her head, and gave one glance at the scene.

One glance was enough. With a wild, startled, greedy look, she was about to spring in. But she controlled herself and softly closed the door, without making the slightest sound.

"Tis all right, all safe," he said. "But we're going to have a gust. I wonder if old Arthur Ames will come, as I have ordered him to do? I wonder if he too, is afraid of thunder and lightning, and sad, moaning winds, and sadder, wailing waters?"

It were hard to believe that such words, breathing refinement, ay, poetry itself, could fall from the coarse lips of such a looking person.

"If he fails to come to-night, it will be the first time he has braved me; the first time, though over twenty years—long, dreary years—have rolled by since that night."

"Ha! what do you want, Nancy?" he asked, as at that moment the door behind him opened, and turning, he saw the woman we have noted before, standing in the room, gazing at him.

A singular-looking woman she was. She, too, was clad as an operative in the mills. Her dress was coarse. Her mass of thin disordered hair, profusely sprinkled with gray, fell down her back. Her face was ruddy, as if she was acquainted with the bottle, however well concealed it was, which the man had drawn from the chest; yet about it, particularly on the brow, and around the eyes and mouth, there were hard, stern, deep-graved lines, indicating trouble, care and sorrow.

She did not reply to the man's question, but stood, looking intently at him.

"I say, Nancy Hurd, what do you want, and why don't you go to bed? I thought you were asleep," he growled.

"Nancy Hurd, is it? and why not Nancy Walshe?" snapped back the woman, slamming the door to and striding like an Amazon into the room, her basilisk eyes glistening like balls of fire.

"You are not Nancy Walshe," sneered the man; and he laughed a wicked, mocking laugh. "And I've told you so before to-night."

The woman didn't move. She had caught the baleful glare of his eyes, and she was somewhat awed. A softer expression crept into her face, and she said, in a low voice:

"I know you have told me so, Phil; but then, I had hoped you was trying to prove me."

"To prove you! Bah! I tell you, that for fifteen years I have allowed you to live with me, but we are not married; the ceremony wasn't a genuine one. Why can't you believe me, and be quiet and reasonable, when I tell you you are not my wife?"

These words were spoken with the utmost coolness, and the man half turned away from her.

A terrible shudder swept over the woman's face

as she listened. But still the tempest which was howling in her bosom, and which she had once subdued, did not break forth. She controlled herself.

"Tis hard, Phil," she said, in the same low tone, "to hear you talk so to me. I have always been true to you, and I thought I was your wife. I was deceived, Phil."

"Then 'tis time you were undeceived, for I swear to you that we were married by a false ceremony, and you know we were both drunk then."

The woman uttered not a word, but turned to go. The man saw the movement. He stopped her.

"I had just as well be plain with you, Nancy Hurd," he said, and his voice was stern and positive. "You can remain here for a while, but when I marry the woman I love, you must go."

Nancy turned like lightning.

"The woman you love. Who is she, man?"

"You know her well enough; 'tis needless to ask. I love—Bessie Raynor."

Though the man's words were bold, yet he sunk his eyes and turned his head away.

"Bessie Raynor! ay, a child of seventeen!"

"She is old enough to be my wife."

"She is young enough to be your oldest daughter. And she hates you, despises you!"

"What care I for that, so I can get her for my wife?"

The woman paused; her eyes were now flashing fire; her Amazon breast was rising and falling, tumultuously; her fingers were twitching nervously.

Suddenly she strode up to the man, and laying her hand upon his shoulder, she hissed:

"I am your lawful wife, Phil Walshe; and I tell you, yes, I swear to you, that sooner than you shall marry Bessie Raynor, I will cut your throat, or I'll tear her heart out! Do you understand me?"

The man cowered for a moment under those bold words, and shrunk away from the gripe of the woman. But he soon recovered himself, and suddenly rising to his feet, he snatched a knife from his bosom and darted upon her. She turned to flee, but his strong hand clutched her and hurled her against the wall.

She turned like a tigress at bay, and her hand rapidly delved down into the folds of her dress. A moment, and a knife, too, flashed in her hand.

"Stand back, Phil!" she hissed. "God knows I have loved you faithfully. But I am strong, and I am armed. I'll not be murdered in cold blood. Stand back, I say!" and she brandished her knife aloft.

But the man still pressed on.

CHAPTER IV.

A FLASH OF LIGHTNING.

It was a terrible fire which gleamed from Black Phil's eyes, and a fearful scowl which darkened his brow, as he strode toward the woman, who now as if driven to desperation boldly confronted him. His large fingers gripped the handle of his knife so hard, that the hot blood on the surface was forced away, leaving them cold and unnaturally white.

But he paused ere he reached her, though the stern, wicked look did not pass from his face.

"You brave me, Nancy Hurd!" he muttered, between his teeth, "and you threaten my life, and you also threaten Bessie Raynor's life. You had better not been born, woman, than to have spoken the words you have just uttered! We have lived together long enough; the time has come when we must separate forever!"

As he spoke, he raised his knife aloft, and, by a sudden spring, darted toward her. The woman stooped and slipped away toward the other corner of the room.

"Phil Walshe! Black Phil! are you crazy? Stand back, I say, or you'll come to grief! Stand—"

But the man sprang after her.

"No, Nancy; to-night we separate; and, for a change, you'll sleep in the Merrimac!" he hoarsely interrupted her. "But if you can handle a knife better than I can, do it; for now you have need!"

In an instant, unheeding the threatening attitude which the woman had assumed, he was before her—his left hand grasping out toward her neck.

At that moment, from the opposite direction, a knife blade raised high in the air, twinkled in the light. The blade, with a whir and a whiz, descended.

A deep, smothered cry of rage broke from Black Phil's lips, as he reeled backward and clasped his arm tightly. One look, however, at the wounded limb satisfied him. It was a mere scratch—the knife having cut its way simply through the skin.

With a howl of rage, the man gathered himself for the contest, and dashed furiously at the woman. She again met his attack boldly, unflinchingly. But, nothing could withstand the fierceness of his onset.

Nancy Hurd's uplifted arm was beaten down, and the knife fell from her nerveless fingers. A moment and Black Phil, with a kick, sent it spinning across the room. Then his brawny left hand had clutched her around the throat.

With a single effort he hurled her to the floor, and still grasping her by the throat, he raised his dirk menacingly above her.

Madly the strong woman struggled to free herself. She succeeded, by a powerful effort, in tearing his grasp away, and gasped:

"Oh! for pity's sake, spare me, Phil! I am not ready to die! I can not die now! Spare me, and I'll be your slave! I'll work on my knees for you and Bessie Raynor! Oh! spare—"

"Enough! You waste your breath, woman! The time has come; you die to-night—this hour, this minute, if there is virtue in cold steel!"

With these brutal words he clutched his knife afresh, and, without hesitating, drove it down.

But that knife was arrested, and in a singular manner—a providential manner.

A vivid, blinding flash glittered into the room, through the open window, lighting up the apartment in every nook and corner. The electric spark leaped to the highly-tempered blade, in Black Phil's hand, and darted into the man's system.

But the metal blade absorbed the greater portion of the charge, and as the handle was porous and a bad conductor, the man's life was saved.

Yet he staggered to his feet, blinded and stunned, and reeling for a moment, fell heavily backward.

The bright blade of the dirk was melted down to the handle.

In an instant, after recovering from the shock, which she too had experienced, Nancy sprang to her feet. Groping around in the darkness, she found and relit the lamp, which had been extinguished. Then she hurriedly thrust the window-sash down, and turned toward the man, whom she loved and honored as her husband.

In a moment she was by his side, leaning over him. She tenderly chafed his temples, and rubbed his hands. Then she knelt down and drew him to her bosom, as if to force back, into his motionless figure, life and vigor.

"Oh! Phil! Phil!" she cried, "wake up and say that you live, that you are mine yet! Oh! Phil, I forgive you—I know that you were drunk, and I knew not what you were doing! Oh! God! can it be? He—he is dead!" she suddenly exclaimed, as she bent her face over to his, and gazed at his rigid, marble-like features.

She sprang to her feet and rushed from the room. In a moment she returned, bringing a bucket of water. Unhesitatingly she flung it in the face and on the head of the unconscious man.

The effect was magical.

A sudden violent tremor shook Black Phil's brawny frame, in an instant a flash of color leaped into his dark face; the stalwart limbs contracted, and, all at once, the man sat up and rubbed his legs.

Nancy Hurd uttered a cry of joy, for, beast as he almost was, she loved this fellow with her whole heart. Then she sunk by his side and threw her arms around his neck.

At first the man was inclined to repel her; for, in a moment, he had remembered everything, and the same brutish look came to his face. But as he glanced before him, and saw the melted dagger-blade on the floor, a shudder swept over him. A scared, yet a softer look, came to his face.

"Twas a close shave! And you, Nancy, are a good old girl to me, after all."

As he spoke, he slowly disengaged the woman's arms from his neck and arose.

"Ha! so late? and he not here?" he exclaimed, as he again glanced toward the clock. "I must see him," he continued, in a low mutter to himself. "I want to get away from these parts, and I'll go after him to-night. I am afraid to stay down here in this thunder-storm. Nancy," and he spoke aloud, "I am going out."

"Going out? and what for, Phil?"

"To attend to business, which is—my own," was the curt reply.

"Business! Yes, and I'll be bound, with old Arthur Ames! 'Tis a strange matter to me, Phil, that one so low in society as you, could have such a visitor, and could visit such a rich gentleman as Arthur Ames, the banker."

The woman peered curiously at him, as she uttered these words in a low, distinct voice.

The man started slightly; but, as a hoarse, half-triumphant laugh broke from his lips, he answered: "This may be strange to you, Nancy, perhaps; it is not to me. But hark you, my old girl," and he lowered his voice and spoke sternly, as an anxious frown blackened his dark face, "whenever Arthur Ames comes here, and is with me in this room, it would be wisdom in you to keep your ear from the key-hole there, and as far away as possible."

"I understand you, Phil," replied the woman, promptly.

"Now, I am going. I'll be back some time before day. If Arthur Ames comes before I am gone, tell him I waited for him, and that I have gone to hunt him up. He'll understand."

He turned abruptly, and striding toward the door, at the further end of the cabin, opened it, and strode out into the dark night.

Nancy Hurd did not move for several moments after Black Phil had gone. She stood gazing at the door through which he had disappeared, gazing at the melted knife-blade—the blade which had been raised against her life—and a dark frown gradually grew into her face.

"I love you, Phil Walshe," she muttered, in a low voice; "but I can hate, too! And—yes—I solemnly swear again, that before Bessie Raynor shall be your wife, I'll drive a knife into her heart! Ay! a thousand times will I do it! And you are hoarding money, are you? To run away and live with the pale-faced factory-girl! Never, so help me God! And you bleed old Ames? What can be the hold you have on him? Shall I ever know it?"

Black Phil, creeping as far as possible from the river, was soon in the road. He hurried along rapidly. "Yes," he muttered, as he rapidly drew near the bridge, and as though a sudden thought had flashed over him, "it's all in my way. They say the old man is bad—paralyzed, or something like it. When he is out of the way I'll work for Bessie harder than ever. Whew! how dark it is! And how loud the dam is!"

He hurried on, reached the bridge, and crossed. He paused as, at last, he stood at the further terminus, and gazed for a moment around him. Then he turned abruptly, and hurried up the small

dingy street, on which, some squares away, stood the humble home of old Silas Raynor.

"I can go through by an alley to Essex, thence into Lawrence, and will lose nothing by getting a look at the pretty-faced, mild-eyed Bessie!"

The wind was rising moment by moment, and now it sung a wild, shrill cadence around the rickety roofs of the narrow way. Occasionally a broad, rapidly flashing sheet of lightning burned out from the black vault above, lighting up the little city of Lawrence as by a million gas lamps.

Suddenly he paused.

Before him, not twenty yards away, was the home of old Silas Raynor, the sea-captain.

A dim light was burning in a room on the ground-floor. That room opened into the little yard.

But Black Phil did not pause, because he was near the house where Bessie lived; nor was it because there was a dim light in the ground-floor room.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE DEATH-CHAMBER.

BLACK PHIL had seen the form of a tall, stalwart man, and knew well enough whose it was.

"Curse him! What the deuce does he mean?" he muttered. "He is always in my way! Some day he'll get out of it, that's all."

With these words he once more strode on. A few moments, and he paused before the alley-way leading into the side yard. He stopped only for a moment. Then he cautiously entered.

He was soon in the yard. He glanced around him. He could see nothing, nor could he hear any thing save the wind moaning and groaning loudly through the branches of the old tree above him. Then he drew near the window, from which the faint light flickered and flashed:

The window was up.

He fairly held his breath, as, at last, he stood by the low casement, and peered in.

He saw every thing. Bessie leaning over the bed, the old sailor, her father, lying upon it, talking to his child, the plain furniture, the few comforts—all.

At that moment another blinding flash came, and another rushing bolt rent the air.

It was then that Bessie Raynor and her father instinctively turned their startled gaze toward the window, and saw the dark face there.

Black Phil fairly reeled under the concussion, and tottered away. He knew that he had been seen, for he heard the wild exclamation of terror break from Bessie's lips.

Scarcely had he set foot upon the pavement, before, suddenly in his way, arose a tall, and threatening figure.

"Ah! you Phil Walshel! What are you doing, prowling here at this time of night?" asked the sudden comer, in a deep, half-menacing voice, as he resolutely barred the other's way.

Black Phil's first movement was to thrust his hand into his bosom. But as a quick, vivid recollection flashed over him, he dropped his hand, at the same time clinching it.

"I have as much right here as you, Lorin Gray," he returned. "But I don't mind telling my business. I'll just say I saw a light, and called by to see how the old captain was."

"Ah! A strange way to learn—listening at the window! The door is in the front of the house!"

"You are meddlesome, Lorin Gray," was the answer. "Dare step between me and any scheme of mine, and you'll hear from me in a manner which will surprise you—that's all!"

"I seek no quarrel with you, Phil," was the reply; "but I laugh at any threat from you. Let me tell you, however, that I have my eye upon you, and if you do not cease your persecution of Bessie Raynor, I'll find the means to make you."

"And who made you her champion?" retorted the other. "I had thought, my fine fellow, that, though mill-man as you are, you dared lift your eyes to the banker's daughter—to Minerva Ames, and—"

"Enough, fellow!" fiercely interrupted the other, striding toward Black Phil. "Be off, and do not tempt me to lay my hands upon you."

"I am going, Lorin Gray; but not at your bidding—mark that! I see I've touched a tender spot! Ha! ha!" And Black Phil strode away.

Lorin Gray stood for a moment and gazed after him in the darkness.

"And does such a scoundrel as that taunt me? I, who was born for better things! Minerva Ames! Do I love her? Do I indeed dare lift my eyes to her? I shudder at the question. And yet she— But poor Bessie! Heaven guide me!"

Black Phil strode on. Reaching a small cross-street, he turned into it. In ten minutes he stood in Essex street. Then, again resuming his way, he drew near the banking-house of Arlington & Ames.

Scarcely had he entered the shadow of the building, when he paused; for, at that moment, the door of the private entrance suddenly opened, and a man came forth.

The light across the street shone over and lit up the pale, chagrined, distressed features of old Arthur Ames.

He started wildly as a hand from the gloom was suddenly stretched out and laid over his shoulder.

"The very man I am looking for," said a voice.

"You—you, Black Phil! What do you want?" asked the banker, tremblingly.

"Did you get my note?" continued the other.

"Yes, yes, Phil; business has kept me late. Call on me to-morrow night, at ten o'clock. Now, I'll go."

"All right, Mr. Ames; and I'll be there. But let me tell you something which, for all I know, may be news to you."

As he spoke, he leaned over and whispered a few words in the other's ear.

Arthur Ames started wildly, though he strove to conceal his emotion.

With these words, Black Phil turned abruptly about and walked away.

Arthur Ames, for a moment, stood musing. He had recovered from the shock which Phil's sudden appearance had occasioned, and now he bent his head in thought.

"Are all the fiends in torment opposed to me to-night? Caught in the act, bound to a man of iron will, by an infernal oath which I cannot break—bound to him with a pledge which gives my daughter's hand to him! Disgraced in an hour! In an hour? Oh! no, no! That has come to me long ago. Dogged by Black Phil, haunted by shadows, I am almost crazy! Bessie! Bessie! And her old father tells tales to her! Would to Heaven she were, by any means soever, in my power! Then I could force her to listen to me. Ha! a bright thought! 'Tis not late. By Heaven! luck may be with me! I'll—"

Without finishing the sentence, he wheeled about, and walking rapidly, disappeared in a moment up the street.

The cloud-storm was now beginning to sprinkle its heavy shower, and the wind was roaring and moaning like weary souls in unrest.

We will now return to the home of Bessie Raynor—to the death-chamber of her father.

"Black Phil! Black Phil, my child?" and a dark frown came to the old man's brow.

"Yes, father; I saw him distinctly! Oh, Heaven! how I fear that man!" and she cowered away, as if she would fain seek protection even from her dying father.

"The fellow is a villain, Bessie. I have known it for many years. And he has a hankering after you, the scoundrel! Nay, tremble not so, my child. We have law and order here in Lawrence, and you have friends, who will see that you are protected. Lorin Gray will—"

"There, there, father!" interrupted the girl, quickly, though the thrill which passed over her frame was delicious. The blush, too, which mantled her cheek at the mention of Lorin Gray's name, was as red as the sunset sky.

"Do not speak of him, or of any one, now, father," she continued. "You said you had something to impart to me; you said, too, father, that your energies were wasting away. Had you not better speak of things more serious, and—"

"Those things are serious, my darling child, very serious to you. I know I am failing, failing fast, Bessie. But I must speak about this matter first; then the other."

He paused, and then bent his eyes toward the flask of rum.

Bessie understood him. She brought the vessel and placed it to his lips.

After taking a huge swallow, the old captain turned his face toward her, and began, speaking rapidly:

"You must beware of this man, Bessie, this Black Phil; and you must be warned of one greater than Black Phil—one more powerful and equally ready to harm you—Arthur Ames."

"Why, father!" and the girl shrunk back, though she did not say nay.

"You know, Bessie, Arthur Ames has paid you attentions which you cannot mistake. Do not interrupt me. You know all this, Bessie, despite the fact that you are barely seventeen, and Arthur Ames is nearly sixty. I tell you, my child, be warned of the man! He may mean no harm; yet, I tell you again, beware of him! I would rather see you dead than his wife! You, who are young enough to be his granddaughter. I thank God that, already, you hate him. Do not be led away or blinded by his riches, for—"

"Oh, father! I fairly—"

"Do not let the glitter of gold dazzle your eyes; do not let that crafty old man throw a net around you. Years ago, Bessie, there were dark tales about the money which Arthur Ames handles, about the gold which dresses him in broadcloth, and spotless linen, which robes his proud daughter in silks and laces, which rolls him about in a gilded coach! But old Silas Raynor is not a tattler; he will not repeat that old-time tale. Perhaps it was idle. But, beware of Arthur Ames—beware of Black Phil! There is a dark link between the men. They are villains, if any are to be found! Yet, Bessie," and the old man's voice trembled as he cast his eyes earnestly, anxiously toward his daughter, "there is one who can be trusted, and unless all signs fail, one who truly loves you, my child—Lorin Gray."

The old man still kept his eyes bent upon the face of the girl.

"Lorin Gray, father! You dream!"

But the maiden's tingling face showed the pleasure which her father's words had awakened in her bosom.

"Dream! Not I! No, no, Bessie, I am seldom deceived. If Lorin Gray does not love my sweet little Bessie, then, for once, I'll own I've steered wild."

Bessie Raynor trembled; an exclamation had sprung to her lips, but she crushed it back. There was pain in it.

After a moment, when she did speak, there was a deepness of soul and an anguish of meaning in her low, scarcely audible tones.

"No, father. You are mistaken. Lorin loves the rich, the handsome, the fascinating Minerva Ames, and—"

"Then God help him or any other man who marries into that family! No, Bessie, I cannot believe it. I have trusted him too much. Lorin Gray is too

good, is too honest, to look away from you, and cast his eyes upon a woman so high above him in life—so far as money goes, you know. Simply because his strong arm held back the runaway horses to her carriage and saved her life, is no reason why Lorin Gray should love Minerva Ames, or seek her for a wife. My word for it, and I see far ahead, there's a mistake in this report."

"You may be right, father; but, is not Lorin's strong arm and the deed it did reason enough that Minerva Ames should love him, and seek him for a husband?"

Bessie asked the question quietly; her tone was low and sad, as she turned her head away.

This was putting the matter in a new light—a strange light, too.

Old Silas Raynor pondered; but, suddenly arousing himself, he said:

"You speak like a woman, Bessie, deeply and knowingly—yet, fearfully. But, hark you, my child, if you do not marry Lorin Gray, if you do not secure him, it will be your own fault! If you lose him you'll lose a prize. But, come, my child, time flies. To other matters; they will not take me long. Oh, my darling sailor-boy, my gallant Ralph! so far away! And I sent him away, Bessie, with such an outfit! Fifty dollars and an old sea-chest! Could I have not done more? No, no; I wanted to save the other for him, for Ross, for you, and— Ha!"

He stopped, and as a shudder passed over his frame, pointed with his left hand to the floor.

CHAPTER VI.

THE KEY TO THE CHEST.

BESSIE RAYNOR looked.

An outside lamp was flaring in the wind; it flung its broad flame of light through the window into the room. The rays sprayed over the floor.

In that faint, flashing reflection, lay a motionless, distorted shadow.

The girl stared wildly and turned hastily toward the window.

But, the light faded out as the fickle gale skurried in another direction.

The ominous shadow was blotted out.

"Gone!" said the old man, in a low, startled whisper. "What could it have been? Was it a premonition of—of what is coming? It could not have been Black Phil; I know him and his dark form so much—so well, that even his shadow could not deceive me. Could it have been, indeed, a fore-runner of—"

"Sh, sh! father!" interrupted Bessie, in a frightened whisper, though her own soul was quaking, and she did not believe the words she was speaking. "It was nothing—nothing but the limbs of the old tree out there. They are waving in the wind."

"Perhaps, perhaps, my child."

But the old man was not satisfied.

"Once more, Bessie, the liquor. I must have it, or my strength will go. Ha! the storm is coming up in earnest!" he exclaimed, as a spectral flash of lightning, and another quickly following, lit up the small room.

The girl again gave the rum-flask to her father, and waited for him to proceed.

This he did at once.

"You recollect, I said, Bessie, that I was able to take you out of the factory. I think I told the truth. Yet, for good reasons, I dared not take you and Ross out, yet awhile. I thought, too, it would all come out right in good time. But, I am cut down very suddenly, my child—too suddenly. 'Tis all one however. . . . I wanted to talk to you, Bessie, to night, about these matters. That is my reason for not wishing the kind neighbors to come in. You can tell my brave boy, Ralph, all about this when he comes back. Alas! . . . Listen, my child; there are some people in Lawrence who know that I am worth, in this world's chattels—something. Arthur Ames knows it, for from him I bought this house. It is mine. Start not, and, I beg you, interrupt me not, for every minute is precious to me. This house is mine; and, though a humble one, it is worth a few hundred dollars. I have the deed which secures it to me, all safe; yet, it has not been recorded. People have thought, perhaps, that I was a tenant of Arthur Ames'. Well, 'tis all one to me."

"Again, my child: years ago—it must be twenty-five at least—when I was in port, from a whaling cruise, I met an agent for western lands. He was a glib-tongued fellow, and, by constantly getting in my way, finally persuaded me to purchase some land. I bought the far-away acres simply to get rid of the fellow. I was flush with money, and didn't mind putting in five hundred dollars. I often regretted my largain. But, not long since, I heard great news, if true, about this same land. The story went—I read it in a newspaper—that this western property, or some just in the same locality as mine, was now worth so much a foot, so much an inch, and that a great city was growing up there. I don't know if o e-half of this is true. The land was up on Lake Michigan, in Illinois. To that property I've got the deed, too, made out regularly by old Squire Abbott, now dead these ten years. You can get some honest lawyer to glance at the papers, and tell you if you can hope for anything in that direction."

"Again, my child: thirty years ago, when I was mate of the old brig Tradewinds, trafficking between Boston and the Mediterranean ports, our crew saved a Spanish merchantman from wreck. We received salvage. My share was twenty golden doubloons, or, in our money, about a hundred and fifty-four dollars. Now, for poor people, that is a good deal of money. Well, well; I was of a saving turn then; I had just married, and was compelled to save. What do you think I did with my Spanish gold? You couldn't guess. I buried it in the 'waste,' far

below the spot where the machine-shops stand today. Lawrence then only had a few houses. It was neither country, town, nor city—just a few houses; my old father's was one of them. I buried my gold, deep under the ground, and marked the spot—marked it with a compass. Well, it has laid where I put it ever since. The city hasn't spread there yet. I thought I would let it lay, and— Good Heavens! what a flash!"

He paused in his recital, as another blinding sheet of lightning blazed into the room.

But he resumed:
"The deed to this house, Bessie, the deed also to the land in Illinois—bend low and listen well, my child—and the compass directions, for finding my buried gold, are sewed all together, in a piece of tarred cloth, tight and secure, and the package inserted in the lining of an old pea-jacket. I put them in there for safety. That old pea-jacket is stowed away in the blue sea-chest, which stands on the landing, at the head of the stairs. Nobody would think of looking for any thing valuable in it. Therein, is its safety. The key to the chest is in my pocket-book. Feel in my pocket, now, for it, Bessie, and take the key."

The girl did as directed. Her soul was filled with wonder. She soon drew out the old-fashioned pocket-book. Opening it, she searched for a moment in the folds.

At last, she held up a small iron key, and gazed at it.

At that instant, a terrific burst of lightning flared, like an avalanche of fire, into the room. It was followed instantly by a fearful collapse of the air.

The very house shook to its foundation, and the rattling of sashes, and the crashing of glass added to the terror and confusion of the scene.

Old Silas turned convulsively over; he gasped but once.

Bessie was flung upon her face, and the little iron key flew, like a bolt, from her hand. But she staggered to her feet, and cast a rapid glance at the form of him who lay upon the bed—him so dear to her.

The glance was sufficient.
The rigid lips, the fallen jaw, the staring eye, told a tale. Bessie understood it.

The dark blue discoloration, like a contusion, covering the upper part of the face, told a tale too.
Silas Raynor had been killed by lightning.

With a loud, wailing cry, a cry of frenzy, coming from a torn and anguished heart, the orphan girl flung her hands to her head, and fell like lead to the floor.

Suddenly a man, with disheveled hair, and a wild, startled expression of countenance, darted from the blackness without, through the open window, into the room. He paused until he neared the staircase leading above. Here he stooped, and picked some small object from the floor.

Whatever it was, he placed it in his pocket. Then turning, he gave one triumphant look at the motionless form of the girl, and retreated rapidly through the window.

In a moment he was in the street.
Rain was now falling fast.

"By Heaven!" he muttered. "Luck has been with me! I've won! The key is mine, and soon shall all the rest be. Now, at last, Bessie Raynor, I have you in my power! You shall feel the biting tooth of poverty, and want and wretchedness! Then you will accept my hand, and—my money! My money! Yes! Mine! I swear it!"

Arthur Ames, the banker, was, indeed, a thief!

CHAPTER VII.

A HAND ON THE SHOULDER.

SCARCELY had the banker rushed forth from the death-chamber of the humble Raynor home that night, as Bessie lay in a swoon, when suddenly the window was again darkened—this time by the tall, stalwart figure of a man.

For a moment he gazed at the terrible scene before him. Then he rushed forward, knelt down, and tenderly lifted the senseless girl in his arms.

"Oh! Bessie! Bessie! Arouse yourself! 'Tis I!" he exclaimed, in a deep voice of anguish. "Oh, darling! why did you not let me stay with you? Heaven be thanked!" he cried, as a shiver passed over the frame of the frail girl.

She opened her eyes and glanced around her. She drew back like a startled dove as she found herself in the arms of the stalwart man, and endeavored to stand erect.

She was unequal to the task, and would have again fallen, had not his strong arm caught her.

"Go to bed, Bessie," he said, in a low, sympathizing tone. "Go to bed; you are exhausted; you can do nothing further now. Leave all to me."

With a sweet look of gratitude, and a gentle pressure of the hand, she turned toward the stairs.

"God bless you, Lorin!"

Then she was gone.

The reader will remember we left old Arthur Ames, some time back, entering the banking house of Arlington & Ames, at a rather unseasonable hour of the night—entering, too, by the private door.

A moment, and the old banker stood within the close room. The air was hot and stifling, as the doors were all closed, and the windows shut down—everything long since being secured for the night.

Arthur Ames stood still for a moment; then moved cautiously in the darkness, passing his hand along the northern wall. Reaching the gas burner, the room was quickly brilliantly illuminated. But he lowered the gas-jets at once to a fine point, and drawing to the wired glass partition which separated the office from the main room, drew the screen of green baize along the polished brass rods. He then almost entirely dimmed the rays which might have

flashed into the counting-room, thence through the plate-glass windows beyond into the street.

But he suddenly paused and bent his ear. He thought he heard the distant creaking of a door, and felt the quickly passing puff of an in-rushing blast.

Trembling in every limb, for several moments he kept quiet. But he heard nothing more. Then he strode forward at once, turned the full stream of gas on again, and advanced unhesitatingly toward the large iron safe. He bent down and, for a moment, looked at the solid, heavy, grim-looking, burglar-defying salamander.

He drew out a key.
He leaned still closer over the lock-hole, and without heeding a slight grating sound which at that instant echoed in the room, he examined the key-hole. Then he placed the key in the orifice, and—

But he suddenly paused, and covered back.
"What am I doing?" he muttered. "What would the law say and do, seeing me thus occupied? What would Malcolm Arlington say, did he now see me, his respected and trusted partner, at such work as this? But the die is cast! Malcolm Arlington has enough and to spare; he'll not miss this. No! I've gone too far, and— My God! what is this?"

A wild cry broke from his lips as, at that moment, a tall form overshadowed him, and a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRICE OF ESCAPE.

ARTHUR AMES sprung to his feet.
"You—you here, Malcolm Arlington!" and his eyes seemed to start from his head.

The tall man smiled sneeringly and bitterly; but his eyes did not lose the other's movements, as the old man's hand slowly sought his breast pocket, and a fixed, dangerous gleam sparkled in his eyes.

Malcolm Arlington understood the motion, and, in an instant, his own hand was in his bosom.

Malcolm Arlington was a noble specimen of his species. He was over six feet in height, stalwart, erect, and of easy carriage. His face was not a bad one. It was a stern, marble-like countenance, resolute, fixed, brave, and unflinching.

The men looked at one another for some moments. Neither spoke. The shaggy brows which lowered over Arlington's eyes gradually contracted until the keen gray orbs beneath them could scarcely be seen. His forehead wrinkled into a frown, and he towered grandly above the little old man, now trembling before him.

"And this is my partner!"
The words were uttered in a tone of commingled scorn and inquiry.

He turned his head as a wild blast at that instant swept around the old bank building, rattling the sashes, and shaking the wire gratings of the windows. It seemed that somebody was forcing the front door.

The movement Arlington made came near being a fatal one to him; for, as he turned, Arthur Ames suddenly drew a pistol, a self-cocking repeater.

His haste defeated his purpose. Facing around suddenly, Arlington saw his danger. With a quiet stroke he struck the old man's arm aside.

The weapon exploded, a sudden sharp report rung in the room, and the ball sped on, imbedding itself in the solid plastering of the wall opposite, and before the would-be assassin could repeat the shot, Arlington clutched him in a giant's grasp, and hurled him to the floor. A moment, and he had wrenched the pistol from his hand.

"Now, Arthur Ames, you are indeed in my power, in more senses than one!" he said, in a deep, hissing voice. "The law would justify me were I to blow your brains out, and I am capable of doing it, for I am armed. But I'll not murder you, old man. I can not slay the father of the woman I love. Get up, compose yourself, and we will talk."

As he spoke, he placed Ames's pistol in his pocket, and, walking leisurely to a chair, seated himself.

The old man quickly staggered to his feet, and sunk upon the settee, near the glass door.

He was conquered, and the dangerous gleam burned no longer in his eyes. He crossed his hands before him, and bowed his head, as a violent shudder shook his frame.

Malcolm Arlington looked at him, scanned him from head to foot, and measured the man who was so completely under his heel. But no softening look came to his face. He was the same stern, composed, iron-gray man.

But he spoke.
"Cheer up, Mr. Ames. Do not be cast down at your discomfiture. Perhaps, after all, by this little affair, you may be the gainer. Who knows?"

Arthur Ames glanced toward him, as if eager to hear more.

"You are interested? 'Tis well. You would like to hear more? Good. I am a man of business. You know it."

He drew his heavy gold watch from his pocket, and glanced at the dial.

"'Tis late," he said. "I will be brief and to the point. I have long suspected, my friend, that you were not altogether right—that you were loose in certain matters, that—Well, in a word, I thought, to a certain extent at least, that you were a villain. Do not start! I am telling the truth, as you know, and I will not be interrupted. You see, my dear partner, you have kept bad company—notoriously bad company. This first opened my eyes to watch you, to look into and scan your shortcomings. Why, on more than one occasion I have seen you at a late hour of the night, in company with that black-visaged rascal, Phil Walshe! More than that, I have seen you on the eastern bridge with Nancy Hurd, the woman who lives with that man. 'Tis true, they are operatives in the Pemberton Mill, and earn their

daily bread honestly. But, Arthur Ames, does not Phil Walshe earn money dishonestly, too?" and he glared meaningly at the old man, as if he would force from him a confession.

Ames did not answer. His arms were crossed upon his breast, and his eyes were bent upon the floor. Yet he was listening.

After a moment, Arlington resumed:

"You see, I am well informed. I was suspicious, and for the last four years I have been *thinking*—have been making inquiries, though you knew it not. To-night I heard from *your lips* that there was something between you and this Black Phil. I overheard enough to lodge information with the authorities of this city. That is one hold. To-night, by chance, I saw you hurrying along wildly. It was unusual. I followed you—followed you hither, and saw you on your knees about to rob the safe. That is another hold which I have upon you. Then, like a coward, you sought my life. I have never harmed you; far from it. I have given you place and prominence in the world; for without association with me, I do not think you would have been known in Lawrence. Yet you made a base attempt to murder me. That is the strongest hold of all.

"I'll not recapitulate; you know you are in my power; that your money, your reputation, your *life*, are in my hands. 'Tis enough. But listen, and learn how you may retain all."

He paused as if waiting for old Ames to speak. But the latter still held his peace; he seemed overwhelmed.

Mr. Arlington resumed:

"Pledge yourself, by an oath to me, that Minerva Ames *shall* be my wife, and all will be well. Refuse, and—"

"Pledge my daughter to be your wife!" broke in old Ames. "Why, my child does not love you; she is too young, and—"

"Bah! and is not Bessie Raynor, the old captain's daughter, too young for you? I'll be sworn, too, she loves you not. You see, I also know about *that* matter. But, Arthur Ames, you have my terms. Answer quickly."

"I tell you the girl does not love you; and if truth be told, though I am sorry to admit it, she loves, I sincerely believe, the fellow who once saved her life, you know—the mill-man, Lorin Gray, old Moll's adopted—"

"I tell you, Arthur Ames," the other answered, "I care not, even were this true. Answer me: do you accept my terms?"

"I can not—I dare not!"

"Then you and your daughter's ruin be upon *you*! I'll lock you, now, in this room, and summon a policeman."

He started toward the door. But old Ames called him back.

"Hold, hold, Arlington! I'll do *anything*! Do not expose me—do not ruin me!"

"You accede?"

Old Ames bowed his head in acquiescence.

"Do you accede?—I want an answer," sternly demanded Arlington.

"I do, I do! quickly responded the old man.

"'Tis very well; you shall lose nothing by it. But we must have papers; I will draw them. Then an oath to bind you, for these documents will admit of no witnesses."

He spoke with icy coolness, as he turned to the desk, and, taking out some sheets of paper, wrote rapidly for several moments.

He was a ready thinker, and his fingers obeyed his will. In a few seconds he laid two written pages before him. Then he glanced hastily over them, as though to see if they corresponded in text. They satisfied him.

"Read them, and sign. They are duplicates," and he tossed the sheets toward old Ames.

Arthur Ames tremblingly took them. He read them carefully. When he had finished, he turned away, as if he shrunk from signing. But he saw the bright gray eyes of Arlington fastened upon him.

He paused, seized the pen, and rapidly affixed his signature.

Malcolm Arlington did the same, and then composedly folded the sheets. One he placed in the inside pocket of his vest; the other he handed to Arthur Ames.

"Yours, Mr. Ames," he said. "Keep it. Now the oath."

As he spoke he drew a Testament toward him from a pile of books, and compelling the other to lay his hand upon it, he administered to him a fearful oath.

Then old Ames snatched his hat, and with trembling haste, strode down the passage to the front door.

Lorin Gray, who had kept a lonely vigil in the death chamber, was astir with the early dawn. He awoke Bessie and her crippled brother, and then—for he was compelled to do so—hurried away toward the mill.

By sunrise, or a little after, it was known all over Lawrence that old Silas Raynor, who, a few days before, had been stricken down by paralysis, had been killed by lightning the previous night.

At nine o'clock a rap sounded on the door of the sorrow-stricken tenement, and in a moment, without waiting, Black Phil was in the little front room, in which sat Bessie and her brother.

"Aren't you coming to the mill to-day, Bessie Raynor?" he asked.

She shuddered and shrunk away.

"Can't you speak, Bessie?" and the fellow approached her.

"Oh, Phil! Do you know the sad news, that father is—is—dead; that I can not come?"

"Then you lose your place, that's all! But Bessie,"

and his voice sunk lower as he approached her nearer still, "say but a single word—that you love me, and will be my wife. Then I will see that you are excused, and that—"

"Oh, Phil! Leave me!"

The poor cripple suddenly sprung from his seat, and snatching a piece of board at hand, rushed upon the fellow, and struck him a smart blow.

In an instant, with a vicious stroke, Black Phil smote him down. Then he strode to the door, but paused, and looking back, said menacingly:

"Look to yourself, Bessie! Look to yourself, Ross Raynor! One of you *must* be in the mill, or—"

He closed the door without finishing his sentence. A half hour afterward, poor Ross, the cripple, left the house, and wound his way to the mill.

Late that afternoon, a half-hour before "letting out" time, Black Phil was walking on the fourth floor of the Pemberton Mill, Ross Raynor was near him. A few hot words passed between them, when, suddenly, Black Phil pushed the crippled boy rudely against and upon the broad leathern belt which was surging up through the floor.

A wild cry rung out—a cry of horror.

The boy was caught on the belt and borne upward toward the narrow rift in the floor above.

Lorin Gray was at that moment near at hand, his coat off, his sleeves rolled up. With a shout he dashed furiously at the belt, and flung his weight upon it.

The struggle was fearful, and all the hands looked on with terror, waiting for the result.

The strong man won. He flung the belt from the wheel above, and the boy, senseless and bleeding, dropped, a crumpled, shapeless mass, to the floor.

"Scoundrel! You did it! I saw you!" thundered young Gray, glaring fiercely at Black Phil.

An angry scowl leaped to that man's face; but at that moment he caught sight of a peculiar mark on the bare arm of the other.

Phil started and shuddered as a wild look of fear came to his eyes.

"My God, the scar!" he muttered, and turned hastily away.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NIGHT WATCH.

A crowd of operatives, by this time, strove to get near the poor boy.

"Take him down-stairs; he must have air," said Lorin Gray, after a moment's examination of the quiet, crushed form before him. "The heat here is stifling!"

In a few moments a stout cloth was brought. Then two of the strongest men gently lifted the bleeding lad into the sheet, and raising him, bore him down the different flights of long stairs, until the outer air was reached. The sun was just sinking, and its beams fell upon the pallid face of the sufferer.

"He is dead!" said a bystander.

In truth the boy looked like it.

"No," said young Gray. "He breathes; I can see his nostrils quiver."

As he spoke he leaned over him, and again examined him.

The murmuring in the crowd against Black Phil, as the willful or unintentional occasion of the sad accident, were growing louder and more threatening.

"He did it! the villain!" said a strong-armed man, who stood by, with a tear in his eye, and a scowl on his face. "And he should be made to suffer for it!"

"Ay, blood for blood, if any harm comes of this!" echoed another; "and the poor fellow and his sister just lost their father!"

"It seems that God forgets us poor creatures at times," chimed in a thin-faced woman in widow's weeds, seedy and threadbare.

"The scoundrel, Black Phil, should be flung into the Merrimac!" exclaimed a stalwart young fellow, indignation and pity strangely commingled in his face. "And, for one, I—but—ha! here the fellow comes!"

At that moment there was a commotion in the outer edge of the circle of human beings who crowded around, and in a moment, amid the half-whispered anathemas, hisses and jeers, which saluted him, Black Phil rudely parted the throng and strode in to the side of the boy.

A frown of defiance wrinkled his brow, and a dangerous fire gleamed from his eyes as he paused and glanced around him.

He was a man that was feared. Hence, when he drew near, the dark words and ominous threats were sunk so low, that they sounded angrily no more.

"I tell you, fellows, that I did not do the thing intentionally," and Black Phil's words were deep and distinct. "More than that, the man who says I did is a liar, and I'll make him eat his words, here before you all."

An ominous silence followed this; and then, all eyes were fastened on Lorin Gray, who knelt on the opposite side of the boy, to see what effect the words of the black-browed mill-man would have upon him. But the young man seemed to have forgotten everything, save the wounded cripple.

"Poor Ross! poor Bessie!" he murmured. "God help them now!"

"To show you that I am fair," continued Phil, "I am willing to pay the doctor's bill. I don't deny I accidentally stumbled against the—"

"Accidentally!" exclaimed the stout young mill-man, who had before spoken; and he strode forward as if he would brave the bully, and as if he was ashamed of the silence he had kept. "I don't believe it! Lorin Gray said you did it on purpose, and Lorin Gray does not lie for such as you, or for any

one else!" and fronting the brawny fellow, he gazed him straight and unflinchingly in the face.

Black Phil's large lips grew livid with anger, and an iron-like rigidity took possession of his repulsive features. He clenched his muscular hands, and said:

"You are a brave man, Adam Lowe, to speak such words to me. And I tell you again, that you and Lorin Gray both lie, if you say that of me! Out of my way, or I'll crush you under my boot!" and he turned as if to force his way out in face of all opposition.

At that instant, Lorin Gray slowly straightened himself up. A deep frown of anger was upon his face.

"Do not notice the fellow, Adam," he said, in a low voice to his friend, as he strode between him and the other. "Now, Black Phil, repeat your words to me, and I'll teach you a lesson you'll not forget soon."

He reared his form as he spoke, until he towered high above his burly antagonist; at the same time he threw himself in an attitude which denoted danger.

Black Phil bent his eyes upon him; then he suddenly raised his clenched hand, and started toward his opponent. But, at that instant, his eyes fell again upon the brawny bared arm of Lorin Gray, again upon the scarlet mark glowing upon the smooth, white surface, so distinctly in the setting sunlight.

His hand dropped by his side; a sudden pallor sprung again to his face, and, with a muttered curse, he stepped back, and said:

"I seek no quarrel with you, Lorin Gray. The world is wide; go your way; I'll go mine. I say again, I did not intend to harm the boy. But," and his voice sunk to a hissing whisper, "look to yourself, my fine fellow, and see to it that your path is yours—not mine!"

Turning, he made his way roughly through the crowd. In a few minutes he had disappeared.

The operatives looked after Black Phil's retreating form, but said nothing. They wondered at the scene which had just transpired, yet they did not seek to explain it.

In the meantime, the crippled boy showed signs of reviving. Lorin Gray saw him. He quickly turned, and ordering a cup of water to be brought, placed it to the boy's lips.

"Now, up with him again, men," he said. "He is coming to; the air has done him good. Two of you bring him along; we'll take him home. And such a home!"

His last words were scarcely audible.

The mill had "let out," but the thronging crowd of men and women, boys and girls, slowly dispersed. The rude litter, with its burden of suffering humanity, was borne away by Adam Lowe and another mill-man, accompanied alone by Lorin Gray, who walked sad and silent alongside.

In fifteen minutes, the solemn cortege entered the little street on the canal, and soon the humble home of Bessie Raynor was reached.

The twilight was settling hazily down, and from the door-knob and the closed shutters of the unpretending house, the black symbol of death was floating dimly in the passing wind.

At that instant, light feet echoed on the uncarpeted floor within, and the bolt softly turned.

Lorin Gray nerved himself. He could not retreat now, could not now shrink away from the ordeal before him.

The door opened; a sweet, almost angelic face peered forth.

The red-rimmed eyes flashed on the scene outside. Only a look was necessary.

The door was flung wide open, and Bessie Raynor darted out, up to the litter. A rapid, searching glance at the pallid, bleeding brow, and a wild shriek burst from her lips.

"Oh! Father in Heaven! 'Tis too much! too much!" and she fell heavily to the ground.

Lorin Gray grasped Bessie's fainting form in his sinewy arms, and lifted her as a feather. The blow had been too great. A dead father in the house, and a brother brought in mangled and unconscious. It was indeed a moment of trial.

"Bear up, Bessie! 'Twas an accident! But—there, there—all will be well. Oh, Bessie! Good Heavens, she is cold! Run, Adam—fly to Dr. Graham, on Essex street; you know the number. Fly, Adam! For there is more than one life at stake!"

He turned, as the young man, letting go the stretcher, dashed away at once, and carried the swooning form of the girl into the house. A moment and he returned, and with the other operative brought in the stretcher, on which lay Rose Raynor.

We have not words to describe the anguish which tore the gentle bosom of Bessie Raynor, when, after a long time, she revived, and learned the extent of her brother's injuries. It was an hour or more before she fully recovered herself, and could realize the new misfortune which had befallen her.

But gradually, exhausted and sick at heart, the poor girl's sobs and moans ceased, and half reclining against the manly heart of the man who sat so anxiously beside her, her head sunk against him, and she slept.

Dr. Graham, who had been summoned, arrived long before Bessie recovered her consciousness. He first examined the wounded boy, only giving a passing glance at the girl, about whom he seemed to feel no concern.

He examined the poor cripple thoroughly, however. His opinion was, that the sufferer was seriously, but not dangerously hurt. His left arm was broken, and he had suffered some contusions. The latter, the doctor said, amounted to nothing; the arm, to get well, would require about four weeks at

the furthest. But the shock was what gave him the most concern.

After thus rapidly, but positively, expressing himself to Lorin Gray, the physician set to work, and applied restoratives, then stimulants, to the wounded boy.

Ross soon revived; but his groanings were piteous to hear.

Administering then an opiate, Dr. Graham, after reassuring Lorin Gray in regard to Bessie's condition, and requesting the young man to remain there that night, left, promising to call early next day.

When, at length, Bessie was sound asleep, Lorin Gray gently laid her on the old settee, placing a pillow under her head. And then commenced his strange night-watch—watching over the living and the dead.

As the hours fled, he felt as though a mighty weight was dragging around his neck—as though he would stifle. He went to the window, which was only partially raised, and flung it up.

He started, as he thought he heard a noise in the yard. But, quickly stepping out, he peered around.

He could see nothing; and strode back into the room; through the open window, which, as the reader knows, was on a level with the ground.

As he entered, he dropped the curtain, thus shutting out, to a certain extent, the scene within from any curious eyes which might be peering around.

He had scarcely resumed his promenade, when Bessie moved uneasily; then a gentle cry escaped her lips, then a wild scream of terror, as she opened wide her eyes, sat upright, and pointed, shudderingly, toward the window.

CHAPTER X.

CAN THE DEAD COME TO LIFE?

It was well that, at that moment, Lorin Gray sunk so quickly to the floor, for just then there was a gush of white smoke, then a sudden, sharp report.

The young man sprung to his feet, and, unheeding the startled cry of the poor cripple up-stairs, unheeding, too, the wild shriek of Bessie, as she threw her hands above her head, and fell back on the sofa, he darted out through the open window.

Rain was beginning to fall, and, as on the preceding night, lightning flashed and thunder boomed in the black sky above.

Once in the yard, he glanced around; but the darkness was inky. He could not see a yard from him, save when the lightning glared through the branches of the old tree. The shot which had been fired into that room, was intended for him or for Bessie; both were in a direct line. But the ball had struck neither, for he had heard its sharp spit, as it tore into the boards of the door behind.

But he would be cautious now; whoever had fired that shot, could in all probability fire another—that other might be more successful.

Just then, a blinding sheet of lightning blazed above. It lit up the yard thereby; even the rain-drops as they splashed into the little puddles, which had already been formed, could be seen.

Lorin Gray glanced rapidly around. He was satisfied that there were no prowlers in the yard; so he returned at once and re-entered the house.

After seeing that Bessie had recovered from her alarm, he went out and secured the gate, which opened from the street into the alley, thus, from that quarter, shutting out danger of further intrusion.

It will be remembered, that after Black Phil had had his stormy words with Lorin Gray, he broke rudely through the ring of persons gathered around, and strode away.

Walking rapidly, he never once turned to look back. Then he had crossed the eastern bridge, and, turning abruptly, bent his stride across the waste land toward his cabin on the bank of the river.

A frown rendered his dusky face more repulsive than ever, and a sinister light burned in his eyes.

When he reached his home, night had fallen, and a light was burning from the same window, as on the night previous.

Black Phil halted as he stood near the cabin; he bent his head in thought.

"'Tis a strange thing!" he muttered. "A very curious thing! The features I can not remember; twenty-two years make a long gap when you look backward. But," and his voice trembled, and it sunk still lower, "that scar! It was never on but one person's arm."

He ceased his mutterings, as, at that instant, the door was opened, and the woman, Nancy Hurd, stood there.

She gazed at him searchingly.

"Why, Nancy, I didn't know you were at home yet," he said, as he drew near and sat down on the door-sill, heaving a deep, troubled sigh as he did so.

"You staid so long with Bessie Raynor, I suppose, that you forgot to come home for your supper!"

The woman spoke bitterly.

Black Phil slightly started.

"You are again treading on dangerous ground, Nancy!" he said, in a low, deep voice. "Keep away from it, or you'll get into trouble for trespassing—that's all!"

"Well, Phil," she said, "where were you, if you were not with Bessie Raynor? You know well enough the mill has been 'let out' long enough for you to get home twice."

"'Tis none of your business, Nancy, and you've no right to ask me questions. But, I'll tell you why I was late. There was an accident in the mill."

"Ah! I hadn't heard it. What was it?"

"Nothing much—a boy hurt."

Black Phil seemed inclined to evade the subject or let it drop; for he spoke curtly, and still bent his eyes on the ground.

"A boy! And who was that boy?" queried Nancy. "There are two hundred and more to choose from."

"It was Bessie Raynor's brother—Ross. I staid to look after him a little."

The woman started.

"Was the lad hurt much? Speak, Phil, for I love that boy!"

"I know you do, and I wonder at it. 'Twas the reason I didn't tell you sooner. But, he ain't hurt much. He got in my way, and I stumbled over him. He fell against the belt coming up from the great turbine, and— Well, he got hurt through his own fault—that's all. Don't ask me any thing else."

As he spoke, he arose and straightened up; but he paused. Laying his hand on Nancy's arm, he asked, in a low, half-tremulous tone:

"Do you think, Nancy, that people ever come to life after they are drowned—dead, I mean?"

The woman glared through the gloom at the face of the man.

"What do you mean, Phil?" she asked, in a low tone.

"What I say: Do you think people ever come to life, when they have been dead for twenty-two years and more?"

His voice was solemn and earnest.

"No, Phil; but—"

"All right, Nancy; enough. You have answered. We'll go in."

CHAPTER XI.

LOOK TO YOURSELF.

BLACK PHIL and Nancy entered the house. The man passed on through the kitchen to the room in which we first saw him; Nancy remained in the former apartment, and busied herself with the stove, on which a frugal supper was cooking.

Once within the room Black Phil glanced around him. As the light shone upon him, it revealed his face, pale and anxious, his eyes wild and startled.

He strode to the key-hole of the door, and cautiously stuffed it with paper. Then, without turning the key in the lock, he crept softly to the secret panel, which we have mentioned before, opened it, and looked, gloatingly, around again at the glittering heap within.

"No, no; not enough yet! I must bleed him more; he must shell out. When I've gathered up a fortune, then good-by to Lawrence! But, not yet; I am not rich enough; I must have more. But, suppose it is the fellow? Good God! I—I would go crazy! No, no; it can not be! And old Arthur Ames! But, I had forgot; to-night I must see Arthur Ames by appointment. I'll be gone, and— You, Nancy!"

"Don't you want your supper, Phil?" asked the woman, coolly.

"No—yes—that is—supper ready?"

"Yes, and waiting."

Mechanically he turned and entered the kitchen, where Nancy had spread the supper.

He sat down, hastily devoured his food, and arose at once. No word had at all been spoken during the meal.

He turned toward the door.

"I am going out, Nancy—"

"Going out again, Phil? You are just in! Can't you stay at home any?" and an angry scowl, mingled with a mad, jealous glance of the eyes, showed the deep emotion which stirred her.

"I am compelled to go—that's all."

"Going to see old Arthur Ames again, or that sickly-faced Bessie Raynor?"

"None of your business. That's enough. Expect me when—you see me."

With these words he turned and hurried away.

Nancy stood near where he had left her, her eyes fixed on the door through which he had gone.

"Ah, Phil!" she muttered, "you, too, are treading on dangerous ground! Look to yourself! I love that crippled boy, but I hate his sister!"

She paused, and then for a moment continued musingly:

"I know not why I love the boy, unless it be that he has never spoken unkindly to me, and has seemed to like me. I'll be true to him; but Bessie! I'll sweep her from my path! And you, Phil, ay! look to yourself."

She turned to the work of clearing away the tea things.

Black Phil hurried along his way. At length he reached the town, and stood in the dark street by the bridge. As on the night before, so now he paused.

"Nancy is right," he muttered. "'Tis but a step by the house, her home. I want to see how that boy, confound him! is; and—yes—pretty Bessie! I want to see her!"

He plunged on again in darkness.

Ten minutes from that time, he entered the alley softly, at the lowly Raynor home. Creeping through, he was soon in the yard.

He started back and sunk into the shadow, as he noticed the open window, and the light shining through. After a few moments he stole forward and peered in.

It was then that the sound of his footsteps had startled Lorin Gray. But when the young man had come out, Phil was hid in the alley.

Again, when the curtains had been drawn, the prowler drew near. He was madly jealous; a wicked fire was burning in his soul.

Then, in an irrepressible moment, he snatched his pistol, thrust his hand through the folds of the curtain, covered Lorin Gray with his aim, and fired.

We have already seen the result of the murderous attempt.

As soon as he had fired, Black Phil turned and fled like the wind. He saw that he had failed, and that his safety lay in flight.

He hurried on, heeding not the flashing lightning and the muttering thunder, nor the falling rain.

He was on other business.

At length he paused before a stately dwelling on Lawrence street; but he suddenly shrunk back as he saw a subdued light shining through the curtains of the parlor windows.

CHAPTER XII.

THE AROUSED BEAUTY.

ON this same night, old Arthur Ames, moody and depressed, sat in the parlor of his elegant mansion in Lawrence street. He was alone.

The light in the chandelier was burning low, yet bright enough to show that the old man's face was the theater of contending passions, predominant among which, were fear and anxiety.

Near him on the piano, stood a decanter and a cut-glass goblet, in a gilded waiter. The goblet was half filled with an aromatic amber-colored liquor.

Old Ames gazed at it. Then reaching over, he seized it convulsively, and speedily drank its contents.

"'Twill make me strong!" he muttered. "It has often done so, in days gone by; now, I am dependent on it—am its slave! Well, well; I care not. Any thing to drive away the black, haunting shadows, which creep around me by day and by night."

He paused as if overcome by some accursed memory, and, after a long pause, resumed:

"Malcolm Arlington! Ay! he suspects. He has a hold upon me now. I fear that iron-gray man. He has found me out at last, and I—his partner! Where will all this end, and how? I have sworn my daughter away to him. Sworn her away with a written document, sealed with a hideous oath! Malcolm Arlington knows his advantage; he will not let it slip from him, for he fears neither man nor devil. And that paper—ah! I have it here. Let me see it once again."

He arose, and drew near a side-burner. He turned the gas on, and a brilliant light streamed through the rose-colored globe. He drew from a breast-pocket a folded paper, and, spreading it open, glanced searchingly over it. Then in a low, deliberate voice, as if he weighed every word as he went along, he read:

"This agreement, made and entered into this 20th day of August, 1859, between Malcolm Arlington of the first part, and Arthur Ames of the second, witnesseth: That, whereas, at a late hour of the night of date above, the said Arlington overheard incriminating words fall from the lips of the said Arthur Ames; and that, whereas, the said Arlington detected the said Ames, on the night above, in the act of robbing the safe in the banking-house of Arlington & Ames, all the contents of which safe, in money, being the property of said Arlington; and whereas, in a moment of chagrin and desperation, the said Ames did feloniously and murderously attempt the life of the said Arlington, it is agreed: "First, That in consideration of stipulations to follow, the said Arlington swears himself to secrecy in the matter, and pledges himself to a lasting silence. That stipulation, to wit:

"That the said Ames pledges, without any reserve soever, and without any yea or nay on his part, the hand of his daughter Minerva, to the said Malcolm Arlington, she to become his wife by the holy bonds of wedlock.

"In case of failure, on either side, to fulfill his pledge, this agreement to be null and void.

"Signed } MALCOLM ARLINGTON.
 } ARTHUR AMES."

Old Arthur Ames paused and glared down at the carpet for several moments after he had finished reading this document of singular provisions.

"No! no!" he muttered, and his voice was harsh and bitter. "There is no escape, and the paper is cruelly binding. Shall I convert my—the property under my control into money and flee? No, no! I cannot! I will not! I cannot give up my treasure; and, ah! blissful thought, I cannot give up Bessie Raynor. She shall be mine, by love or by force. I'll grind her down to poverty. I have the key; I know where the deeds are kept, and the directions for finding—"

He paused suddenly.

At that instant the door opened, and the tall, stately form of Minerva Ames entered.

She was a brilliant looking girl, with her large, grand eyes, her noble brow, her haughty mouth. Her rich black hair was drawn away in massive coils from her forehead, and then it was allowed to fall unrestrainedly over her shoulders. She was richly clad, as if for some great reception.

But there was something proud and wondrously scornful in the whole face.

To-night, as she unceremoniously opened the door, and entered the drawing-room, she was fuperbly beautiful; but a frown was upon her brow.

Arthur Ames hastily lowered the light by which he was standing, and crumpled the bond in his bosom. Then he turned toward his daughter.

"Ah! is it you, Minerva?" and he glanced at her searchingly, by the mellow light glancing from the chandelier.

The girl did not answer. She walked majestically to a chair, and, without heeding her father, seated herself. Then she spoke, and there was sarcasm in her tone:

"You are fond of being in the dark, father."

"My eyes are weak; they pain me in a bright light, my child," was the old man's reply. And there was a tremulousness in his words, a something

which betokened that he dreaded this interview with his daughter. From her manner he knew that for some purpose she had sought him—that she had something to impart.

"Ah! a recent affection, father," and she sneered. "But let it go; the light is sufficient. I did not know you were in, until Mary told me just now. Of late you come and go so like a shadow that we must needs set spies on you to find you out."

The old man started, and glanced hurriedly at his child.

"Spies! spies, Minerva?" he asked, seriously, "and on your father?"

This time the daughter started.

"I did but joke, father. But I am glad you are in. I want to see you."

"I've been in the house since four o'clock; long enough, truly, for you to find me. But what do you wish with me?"

Minerva Ames did not, at first, reply. She cast her head down, and seemed to ponder. But, as she lowered her eyes, she flung a bright, searching glance at her father.

After a moment she slid her hand into her bosom, and drew out a letter. Handing it to the old man, she pointed to the superscription, and said:

"I received this letter this afternoon. Do you know that handwriting, father?" I ask, because if anybody should know it, you are the man!" and she held it before his eyes.

Old Arthur Ames glanced through his spectacles at the written words.

A single glance was sufficient. He drew back. His face reddened, then paled, and he riveted his eyes almost threateningly upon the face of his daughter.

"Yes, Minerva," he said, "I should know Malcolm Arlington's handwriting, and—"

"Tis well, father. Now we'll see if you can interpret the contents of this letter. Listen."

Going beneath the chandelier, she read:

"MISS MINERVA AMES:

"I am a man who never minces words, or evades a point he wishes to make. So, in this case I will not deviate from a life-long rule.

"1st. I love you, Miss Minerva—love you more than I ever loved woman—even more than my mother, heaven bless her memory. I love you honestly—for your beauty, your accomplishments, for your status in society, and because I am convinced you would make me a good wife. I have loved you now for four years, during which time my heart has never turned aside after another idol.

"2d. There is a bond existing between your father and myself, which makes it best for you, and for him, that you should hearken to me. That bond is of a pecuniary nature. Perhaps Mr. Ames will enlighten you in regard to it. If so, he has my consent.

"I write this as a forerunner of a call from me. I will do myself the honor to visit you to-morrow evening, when I hope it will be your pleasure to receive me.

"Respectfully and sincerely yours,

"MALCOLM ARLINGTON."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FATHER'S CONFESSION.

OLD AMES sunk into a chair, bowing his head upon his breast. A smothered sob burst from his lips, then an anathema.

Minerva looked searchingly, yet scornfully, at him.

"Now, father," she said, in a cool, deliberate tone, "explain this strange matter to me, if you can."

But he did not raise his head.

"Can't you speak, father? Have you lost your senses along with your tongue? How is it that you, in view of a pecuniary obligation, should dare pledge my hand to Malcolm Arlington? Tell me, if you have, indeed, done such a thing."

Still there was no answer.

The girl became impatient.

"Does Malcolm Arlington tell the truth, father?"

"Yes, yes, my daughter," answered the other, hastily, as he half sprung to his feet.

"Do you mean to tell me, father," and the girl's eyes flashed fire, while her bosom heaved with emotion, "that you, with all your various properties, with your high standing in the community, are under a pecuniary indebtedness of such magnitude to Malcolm Arlington, that, in security for it, you should pledge my hand to him?"

"Listen to me, Minerva," he said. "I have seen this terrible matter coming for a long time; but I had hoped to avert it. I have striven hard to keep it from you, my darling. I am in Malcolm Arlington's power, am bound hand and foot to that man, and—"

"You in his power! You bound hand and foot to him! I can not credit my senses! I know that you are worth piles of gold! In the safe, in your chamber, fifty thousand—"

"Sh! sh! Minerva! Don't speak so loud! You know you—"

"And are you dishonestly bound to him?" she fiercely interrupted him. "Have you cheated Malcolm Arlington, or stolen from him?"

Her voice was hoarse and commanding.

"Yes, no, that is—of course—not! Never! Do you think I am a thief, Minerva?"

"It matters not what I mean, and I know not what to think. I want to get at the truth in this matter. Tell me, I bid you!" and she stamped her foot authoritatively.

"I will tell you all, Minerva," he said. "You know that I am reputed rich. The world thinks so; but this house, with its elegant appointments, the property I own here in Lawrence, the pile of gold in the safe up-stairs, are not mine!"

"Not yours, father! Then, whose are they? Did you steal them, or inherit them by fraud?"

A marble-like pallor spread over his features as the last sentence spoken by his daughter fell on his ears. He started, a choking sensation seemed to spring up into his throat, and he held his hand half-threateningly toward her.

"What mean you, girl?" he demanded, in a harsh voice. "Whence those insinuations?" and he glanced at her like a wolf.

It was now Minerva's turn to start.

"Insinuations, father?" and her voice was a little unsteady. "I only asked a question. You say the gold in the safe, the property in Lawrence, and this house, belong not to you. I ask again: to whom do they belong?"

Old Ames trembled at the persistency of his daughter, but he felt the blaze of her eyes upon him. He recovered himself, and looking her in the face, he said:

"That they are not mine, and that I am deeply involved, should be sufficient. But, I'll tell you, Minerva, and briefly: I have been going behind-hand a great deal for several years past. I injudiciously indorsed notes, which I had to take up and pay. Then, I lost, first in this, then in that venture. Then, for a certain speculation, I needed ready money. I had it not. I knew there was money in the bank. I determined to use it. I borrowed it."

He hesitated, as the falsehood stuck in his throat. "I kept on borrowing," he continued, "until I got irretrievably involved. I could not conceal it from my partner. He had long suspected it. At last, he charged me right out with pilfering from the safe, saying that he knew I was guilty of theft. My blood boiled, for I had not stolen. I had simply borrowed, intending, of course, to return every cent. He would not listen to me. The amount I had taken was large—very large, Minerva, larger than the pile of money in my safe. So large, alas! that not only that money, but my entire property, is under lien to him—to Malcolm Arlington! He would not be satisfied with less!"

As this other falsehood fell from his lips, he paused again, and looked covertly at his daughter.

Her blazing eyes were fastened upon him; she was reading his countenance.

Did she read it aright?

"Now, Minerva, but little need be added. Only last night, I met Arlington. He invited me to the bank, and then and there, under threat of exposure and prosecution, forced me to enter into an agreement with him. The stipulations in that agreement were briefly these: First, on his part, he would say nothing of my conduct, and would not even exact from me that which I had taken—*borrowed*, you know; if, secondly, on my part, my darling child, I agreed that you should give your hand in marriage to Malcolm Arlington. Ah! my child, I yielded, for I knew that you would not see me disgraced forever!"

He paused and bent his head, not daring to look up.

Minerva Ames's face was now like marble, her eyes stared almost meaninglessly before her, and her lips twitched nervously.

"You pledged yourself, then, dear father, to give my hand to a man old enough to be—your brother, at least?"

"Yes, my child. You see you are still in your minority, and—"

"But, I am a woman, father, and have a woman's heart, a woman's feelings. I can suffer, if I am yet under age. 'Tis very hard that, for your shortcomings and defections, I should sacrifice myself—all happiness—life itself, perhaps!"

"Sacrifice, my child? Why, Malcolm Arlington is a fine-looking man, in the very prime of life, and I know he loves you sincerely; and—he has money—money—Minerva! that fairy something, through whose agency he clutches me by the throat!"

"Nevertheless, I love not the man! You have sold me, father; in that act you have doubly disgraced yourself. Come what will, I can not stand by the pledge!"

"Can not! Why, my child, would you sacrifice me, my name, all our money and position to—"

"But, father, I love another!" and a wail went from her lips.

"Who?" thundered the old man, his eyes afire.

"Lorin Gray," was the low, but distinct reply.

"What! that base-born—Ha!"

He paused, for, at that moment, the hall bell rung in a peculiar manner.

CHAPTER XIV.

HUSH—MONEY.

"You must go, Minerva," said old Ames, hurriedly. "I forgot that I expected company to-night, and—Ha! another storm!"

He shuddered as, just then, a dazzling flash illumined the mellow-lighted room for a flitting moment, and then was gone.

He cowered away.

"Yes, father, another storm: and I welcome it, for it is but a counterpart to the one raging in my bosom."

Again the warning bell sounded loud and sharp, as if rung by one who would be heeded.

"Go, Minerva; my visitor is urgent. We'll resume our subject at another time. Now—"

"Father, is not this visitor that black-browed mill-man, who already has come so often?" and she turned toward him. "How can you admit such a—"

"I tell you, Minerva, go! Go at once!" and Arthur Ames stamped his foot vehemently, and pointed toward the door.

With a scornful smile breaking over her hard, pale face, Minerva walked from the room.

At last a servant was heard hurrying along the passage to answer the bell.

A moment, and the door of the parlor opened. A short, thick-set man, his face concealed under a wide, soft hat, entered. He turned at once and closed the door. Then, business-like, as if perfectly at home, he locked it.

"I am here, Mr. Ames," he said, in a rough, familiar manner. "I never break an engagement."

"I know it," replied the other, with some bitterness, "especially when you come for money and to persecute."

"That's lively! Persecute! Pshaw! Mr. Ames, we are old-time partners in an old-time business. I come, you know, to look after the dividends. The affairs of the firm have not been settled. I am sure there's a balance due me. You can pay it, you know, in installments; but I want one paid to-night, that's all."

The man was collected, and cool in the extreme.

"I know your errand, Phil. But"—and old Ames's voice changed; his words were stern and threatening, as he turned half-fiercely toward the other—"the day will come when the last installment will be paid, my man! This thing can't, and shall not last."

Black Phil started just the slightest.

"The gallows is a dark thing, Phil Walshe. Does it ever come up before you?"

The black-browed man shuddered, and a frown knit his brow, as he retorted:

"You are hard on me to-night, Arthur Ames. I did the work. I don't deny it. Yes. But hanging to me is not as bad as exposure to you. By death all would be over with me; by exposure, you would lose what you value more than life—the money you handle."

"Enough of this, Phil. We know one another. How much money do you want to-night?"

"That's clever, and to the point. Why, a hundred will do."

The old banker winced; but he said nothing. Rising he gave a glance at his singular guest, and left the parlor.

Chuckling low to himself, Black Phil left his chair, and sauntered toward the elegant piano. As he passed near the side-light with the rose-colored globe, he paused. He was near the same spot old Ames had stood when he read the contract between himself and Malcolm Arlington.

Black Phil had seen something lying in the shadow near by the wall. He stooped and picked it up.

It was a folded paper.

Striding under the chandelier, he opened the paper and glanced over it. After reading only a few lines, a cry of exultation almost broke from him.

"Ah! and this is why you kept such late hours at the bank. Ha, ha! old man, this is worth more to me than all the gold I'll get to-night. I'll keep this well, ay—"

At that moment the door was reopened.

Black Phil crushed the paper in his pocket, and with a calm, imperturbable face, met Arthur Ames.

"Here is the money, Phil. Now I suppose, you are satisfied. I want to be alone."

"And want me out? All right."

His hand was on the door-knob.

"Ah! stop, Phil, a moment, if you please. I heard about the accident at Pemberton. How is the boy?"

"Not hurt much," was the reply, as the man paused and glanced covertly at the banker.

"And—Bessie? how is she?" and his voice faltered.

Black Phil's eyes glittered with jealous fires as he answered:

"Bessie Raynor is well—well enough."

"Will you take her a message from me, and say—"

"No, I won't" snapped the man, rudely, as he turned and faced old Ames defiantly.

"And why, if I may ask?" demanded Ames.

"I'll tell you, Arthur Ames, in a few words. I believe you are tormenting that child. And why—I love the girl myself—that's all!"

"You love Bessie Raynor? I—"

"Yes; and I have the inside track on you!"

With these words Phil hurried down the hall.

When near the street door a hand was suddenly stretched out from the gloom, and laid upon his shoulder.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BELLE AND THE OPERATIVE.

BLACK PHIL turned. A voice whispered in his ear:

"Be still, man. 'Tis I—a woman—Minerva Ames. Speak not. Take off your boots and follow me."

Wondering what all this meant, he obeyed. Taking off his heavy boots, he strode on softly behind the girl, who led the way swiftly up the passage. Not a word was spoken.

The back door opened before the girl's touch.

Minerva gently pulled the man outside under the shelter of the piazza.

"I knew it was you," she said, in a low, guarded tone. "I waited for you. I want you to do a service for me, for—money."

"Yes; I am listening, miss," was the reply, in the same guarded voice.

"Good. I have written a note to one who works with you in the Pemberton mill. Will you deliver it to him?"

"Certainly; who is it for?"

"Lorin Gray."

Black Phil started; but the girl continued:

"Give it to him early in the morning, the first thing you do, mind you. I'll pay you when I see Lorin Gray here, for then only will I know that you have delivered the letter."

The man pondered for a moment. He saw that Minerva Ames was business-like.

"All right," he said, at length. "I accept your terms; give me the note."

He reached out his hand for it. He half-shrunk away, as, feeling about in the darkness for her hand, his fingers, as he touched the letter, struck the cold barrel of a pistol.

Minerva Ames was wary.

But Phil took the letter, and crept out into the yard, thence over the wall into the street.

"Can all this be true, or is it a hideous dream? Has my father deceived me? Are we, indeed, penniless? Can I give up wealth? Can I part with station, society, luxury—give up all, and cling to Lorin Gray? Oh! the world! Can I turn my back on it, and wed Lorin Gray? Alas! alas! when that money and all that property, so valuable, were ours, then I thought I would have enough for both of us. But Lorin Gray is poor, very poor, and he is a mill operative. Have I thought of that? Yes, 'tis not too late; the world knows not that my love, so much sought after, has gone out after this open-faced, iron-limbed, high-souled man. Nay, he, himself, does not know it. Does he suspect it? Shall he know it? A crisis has come. Oh! Heavens! I can not sacrifice my position in this world—in society! Shall I retain it, shall I retain money and luxury, by marrying that cold, heartless man, Malcolm Arlington? One or the other I must do! But I must, I must love Lorin Gray—the man so noble, so bold, so handsome, so stalwart—the man who stood between me and death! Who—Ha! Somebody stirring in the house? I must enter, and seek my room."

In a few moments she was in her room.

Minerva Ames was a proud girl, worldly-minded and ambitious; but that night, retiring, she sunk in her rich evening robe by her bedside, and bowed her head, and wept and prayed.

She had scarcely gone up-stairs, when some one glided toward the parlor door, and disappeared in the room.

The lights still burning in the chandelier, shone down on the pale, anxious face of Arthur Ames.

He quickly turned on a full stream of gas, and began at once groping about the apartment.

"Could I have lost it?" he muttered. "That paper which barter away my daughter, my reputation! Could I have dropped it? Black Phil was here! No, no! That would, indeed, be terrible! I must have hid it in my desk when I went up-stairs for the money. It will be safe there, if it is there."

He paused. His search had been in vain. Turning abruptly, he left the room.

The next morning, at an early hour, Black Phil reached the mill. Before ascending the stairs, he watched and glanced around him. He seemed to be expecting some one.

Suddenly his eyes brightened, as he saw a tall form approaching.

Lorin Gray came up. He saw Black Phil, and was about to pass him without speaking. But Black Phil approached him, and said, so low that no one else could hear him:

"You needn't be so stiff toward me, Lorin Gray. I have something for you—a letter from a lady, who asked me to give it into your hands—Miss Minerva Ames."

Lorin Gray started, confusedly, and a deep red stained his face.

"A letter for me from Miss Ames? And you the bearer! Impossible!"

A dusky flush crept into Black Phil's cheeks. But he said, quietly:

"'Tis very possible; 'tis a fact, Lorin Gray. I think I am an honest man to bring it to you—you who tried to bring trouble on me about that crippled boy. But, here is the letter."

As he spoke, he handed the missive to the other.

Lorin Gray clutched it greedily. Tearing open the envelope, he read the letter. He cared not for Black Phil. That letter was brief, only a line or so.

When he finished it, a glad glow, which he could not conceal, spread over his face. He turned to Phil.

"Were you paid, Phil, or shall I—"

"I want no money from you, Lorin Gray," interrupted the other. "My wages are, if you remember, somewhat better than yours."

Without any reply to this rude speech, Lorin Gray hurried away to his work.

But, accidentally, he had dropped the letter.

Black Phil clutched it, and hid it in his bosom.

Late that evening, when the dark-browed mill-man hurried his home, he chuckled, as he said:

"I hold the right bower in this game! I wonder if I can't take the queen with it!"

CHAPTER XVI.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

A SUBDUED light burned in the little second-story back room of the humble Raynor house. Within that room, on a low, common bed, though one with sheets and counterpane faultlessly white, lay Ross Raynor, the cripple.

The boy's pale face shone like a graveyard marble in the dim light; the large, expressive eyes lighting up the rest of the countenance, so ghastly, as they sparkled brightly around. On the forehead was a dark, ugly patch—the doctor's work—shutting out the confusion occasioned by the accident.

The boy's face, though attenuated and pallid, was a sweet one—one over which it seemed an angel's wing had swept—one over which pleasant breezes from a far-off, heavenly clime seemed already to have crept, leaving quiet, serenity, and resignation there.

The physician had been attentive to his patient,

and had only left him an hour before, after looking to the appliances in which he had set the broken limb.

The boy's eyes wandered around him; they rested upon Bessie. She was asleep, though the hour was early. She was worn out and exhausted.

The dead body of the old father was still in the house. The funeral was to take place on the morrow.

Bessie had silently wept herself to sleep this evening. She had been thinking a great deal of her father, whose loved form was soon to be laid away in the grave. Since she could remember, she had not been separated from him. Her mother had died when she was a little girl; in fact, when poor Ross, the cripple, was an infant.

Now, she was all alone with that wounded brother. By a mysterious Providence, her father was dead; and Ralph, her noble sailor-brother, was far away on a foreign sea.

She felt desolate, and tears had flown; then she had passed into a deep, dreamless sleep. Her head was in the shade, her brother's in the light.

It was a picture, in that room. We'll not paint it; let the reader imagine it.

Ross Raynor was a cripple from youth. He was now sixteen years old. An affliction of the spine had distorted his thin, frail figure, dwarfed his stature, and made him a weak, delicate creature—the very sport of the winds. But he had been brought up to work, and to work hard, in a hot mill, with the clatter, and roar, and jar of machinery constantly around him.

We do not deny that we find this statement difficult to reconcile with old Silas Raynor's last words to his daughter, that he was able to take his children from the mill. Perhaps he had reasons other than those he gave—reasons he intended to give, but upon which death had now put an eternal seal of silence.

The boy's eyes rested upon his sister; tears came to them, as, in a low, hushed voice, he murmured:

"Poor, poor Bessie! She has been very good to me; now she is worn out. Oh, Heavens! we are all alone, and so poor! God pity us!"

The girl moved in the chair. She raised her head.

"Were you speaking, Ross?" she asked. "Do you wish any thing?" and rising, wearily, to her feet, she drew near the bed, and looked down tenderly in his face.

"I was saying something, Bessie; I was talking to myself. But I did not wish to disturb you, my dear sister."

"You did not disturb me, Ross, and I am sorry I so far forgot myself as to go to sleep."

She sighed and bowed her head, as a tear rolled down her face.

"Why, Bessie, what's the matter? Oh, sister, do not cry, for I wanted to talk with you to-night—seriously, too. I have just been praying, and my mind was made up; I was strong to talk."

"Oh, Ross! what mean you?" and Bessie suddenly raised her head and gazed at him.

But upon the cripple's face there was a sweet smile and a heavenly rest.

"Don't be startled, Bessie," he said; "I do not mind it now. I did at first; but the terror has passed away."

He still smiled softly, touchingly, as his great bright eyes shone into her face.

Bessie slid her hand down beneath the sheet, until it reached his unwounded palm. She pressed his hand tenderly in hers, and looking him earnestly in the face, said:

"What mean you, Ross? You speak strangely, and there is a wild look about your face. Tell me, my brother, if any dark thought distresses you; tell me if—"

"I will, Bessie," interrupted the boy, as a half-stern look of resolve came to his face.

He paused for a moment; then he said, suddenly: "Bessie, have you thought, since father's death, night before last, that— Well, have you thought how poor we are—how desolate—how forsaken? Have you pondered for a moment on the fact, that now, indeed, we are dependent upon our own exertions, and upon—what is a slender support—the cold charity of the world?"

Bessie Raynor did not answer at once. She bent her head again, as her eyes filled with tears. But she quickly looked up, as a glad smile played over her lips.

She had been thinking.

"No, no, Ross," she said, in a low, joyous tone, speaking rapidly. "Let these forebodings pass from you. I have a secret, told me by poor father on his death-bed. You should have known it before, had not that dreadful accident happened. We are no longer poor, Ross, and can leave the mill at any time."

The boy started violently, and, as a twinge of pain shot through his wounded arm, he groaned.

"Restrain yourself, my dear brother; keep quiet and I will tell you what papa told me—will tell you all. Now, will you keep quiet and listen calmly?"

Wonderingly the cripple gazed at his sister; then he slowly nodded his head in token of assent.

Drawing still closer to him, Bessie grasped afresh his thin, hot hand, and began at once.

CHAPTER XVII.

A RAP AT THE DOOR.

BESSIE RAYNOR spoke rapidly; but, scarcely had she uttered a dozen words, when a wild, doubting expression came to her brother's face, and a half cry of wonder broke from his lips.

But he restrained himself, and listened.

At last Bessie concluded, and, with an angelic smile on her face, and a triumphant glance in her eye, she watched Ross.

"Deeds to this house—to lands in the West—directions for finding Spanish gold! Good Heavens! Bessie, can this be true? Am I awake or dreaming still?"

"This is true, Ross. Father told me what I now have told you, and—"

"Oh, Heavens! then, Bessie, why should I have gone to the factory, when we were rich—gone to be thus maimed? Ah! I—"

"I understand you, my dear brother," hastily interrupted the girl, as a thrill of agony shot through her frame. "I was so troubled and grieved that I forgot every thing, Ross, except that our father was dead, and that we needed money. There is but little in the house, and, you know, I could not go to the mill. Then, Black Phil, he—"

"Yes, true enough, Bessie. But then, you know, Lorin Gray is our friend yet. Had you told him about these things, the deeds and the money—yet without telling him, in fact—he would have furnished us means, until we could—"

"Yes, Ross. But Lorin Gray is a poor man himself, and—"

"He is rich enough to buy good clothes, in which to go to see Minerva Ames, the banker's daughter."

Bessie winced, a convulsive shiver passed over her frame, and she half let fall the hot hand of the sufferer.

Ross took no heed of her perturbation. Perhaps he had not noticed it. At all events he went on to say:

"'Tis strange, Bessie, that Lorin should care so much for us. Everybody sees that, workman in the mill that he is, he loves Miss Minerva; and people say, too, that the banker's daughter doesn't hate him."

He paused, and his large, bright eyes sought his sister's face.

Ross Raynor was too young, it may be, to read heart-secrets; he did not scan his sister's face to read hers.

"Lorin Gray, though he is a poor man, working in the mill, is a noble, honest man, Ross," said Bessie, in a slow, labored tone, as, looking up, she saw that her brother expected an answer.

Then, in a trembling voice, she continued, as she cast her eyes down:

"I don't blame him for—for liking Minerva Ames. She is beautiful, very learned and rich. But she is not more learned than Lorin Gray. Mother Mull, I've heard say, sent him for ten years to the best schools in New York city."

"Yes, I've heard the same. But it is strange, Bessie, that Miss Ames could turn away from the many beaux, fine, rich, handsome gentlemen, too, who go to see her, and that she should prefer Lorin Gray to them all. I don't believe she does; I can't believe it."

"Lorin Gray is a very handsome man, Ross. He is young and strong. Then, you know, he risked his life to save Miss Ames the day her horses ran away on the Salem turnpike."

"Yes, yes; I had forgotten! That was a bold deed, and it takes Lorin Gray to do just such a thing. He saved my life, too, you know, by doing what six men can't generally do; flinging the belt from the big turbine. But, alas! I—yes—I have a sister, too," he suddenly exclaimed, and she is a prettier and better girl than Minerva Ames, rich as the banker's daughter is!"

"There! there! 'Sh! Ross; you speak idly!" and, as a crimson blush mantled her cheeks, she bowed her head.

"Then why does Lorin Gray come here?" asked Ross, his mind suddenly turned in another direction.

"Why, he is a common workingman, himself; we are poor people, too, and he has a good heart. That's why he comes here."

Bessie stammered as she uttered these words.

Ross did not reply; a reflective shade passed over his pale face; then a frown wrinkled his scarred brow.

Was it pain, or was a black fancy passing through his brain?

Bessie watched him.

"Does your arm hurt you, brother?" she asked.

"Not more than usual, Bessie. I was thinking, sister, that I had forgotten to tell you something," and he kept his eyes on her face.

"Well, Ross?"

"I have had a vision, sister, a strange, distorted vision which assumed shape."

"Oh, Ross! speak not—"

"Do not interrupt me, Bessie. I'll tell you briefly about this vision. It came to me last night, and all day long have I been thinking of it—have been praying over it! The spring, with its green grass and beautiful flowers, Bessie, will not come to me again! Before the snows have melted from the hills, and the ice has left the banks and drifted down the Merri-mac, I'll be gone from you! Then you and Ralph alone, will be left of our family. Oh, Bessie, I have had a vision of death—my death!"

As he spoke he buried his head still further in the pillow, and closed his eyes.

She shook him gently. He opened his eyes and smiled sweetly at her.

"Another time, Bessie, and I'll tell you all," he said; "not now."

Again he closed his eyes, and in a few moments his gentle breathing, his placid, immobile countenance, his perfect quiet, showed that the poor cripple slept.

Bessie trimmed the lamp, and, sitting by his side watched him, with tear-filled eyes.

The hours grew on, the night darkened and deepened, and the sad winds moaning along the water, sighed around the eaves and corners of the humble

house of poverty. These night-winds seemed to sing a doleful requiem over the dreary house and the desolation abiding within.

Again Bessie's eyes grew heavy. But suddenly she started and sat upright.

A low, guarded rap on the street-door had aroused her.

The rap was repeated.

Bessie arose, as a look of fear crept into her face. She paused, however, ere she turned from the chair. But then, like lightning, a glad expression sprang into her eyes.

"Lorin!" she exclaimed. "He promised to come; he is here. May Heaven bless him!"

Without waiting longer, she hurried down-stairs, and creeping softly through the death-inhabited room, lit by its single unpretending taper, she reached the front door.

She paused here a moment; but, summoning her resolution, she suddenly flung the door wide but softly open.

The light gleamed out, and with a little cry of alarm, Bessie started back at what she saw.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BANKER'S VICTIM.

ON the afternoon of this day, the events of the night of which we have given in the preceding chapter, Arthur Ames sat in his parlor. The windows were up, and the grateful breeze fluttered and rustled the loosely-hanging lace curtains, as it crept gently in.

A chuckle broke from his lips—a triumphant, satisfied chuckle—as he muttered:

"Not so bad! not so bad! I'll have my cool hundred and fifty thousand, anyway; more too, if Minerva consents to be the wife of Malcolm Arlington. He loves her madly. All the better for me! Ha! ha! Malcolm Arlington has much money and no kin! 'Twill be mine some day, or Minerva's—the same thing. She shall consent. I'll not give her a minute's rest. Then, if worse comes to worst, I'll convert my property into gold and fly! I fear something—something which I can not define. What, indeed, if the water has given up—Pshaw! No! no! But, should it! Then Black Phil would, in comparison with me, be a free man. I'll see the old woman, who pretends to read the future. Some say she can tell what has happened in the past, and what is to come to pass. Marvelous tales are told of old Mother Moll. I have not forgotten about Abbott Johnson's money; I'll cross her hand with gold—rich, bright gold. And she shall unlock to me—"

He did not finish the sentence; for at that moment the bell jingled.

Arthur Ames glanced at his watch. It was a strange and unfashionable hour for callers. Who could this be?

The parlor door opened, and the servant girl entered, bearing a card. Arthur Ames glanced at it, and an angry expression, spiced with fear, crept into his face.

"Show the gentleman in," he said, abruptly, to the domestic.

"Confound him! He is in earnest about the matter," he continued, as the girl withdrew.

In a moment, the tall, elegantly-clad form of Malcolm Arlington darkened the door. He paused for a moment, and then, with a low bow and a half-mocking smile, entered the room.

"I am fatigued, Mr. Ames," he said; "and as you fail to invite me to be seated, pray excuse me for taking that liberty."

These words were spoken in an easy, off-handed tone, as the gentleman sunk composedly into a chair.

"Pardon me, Arlington. I am glad to see you; and your—"

He paused, as, looking up, he saw the keen eyes of the iron-gray man fastened upon him.

"I understand you, Arthur Ames," said the visitor, half sternly. "You would know my business. My dear sir, you are aware that bank hours are over. We are partners, too, and in view of recent occurrences, it seems to me that you should be glad to see me. Surely you have not forgotten that I am to be your son-in-law?"

This time, the mocking smile did not lift the iron-gray mustache over Malcolm Arlington's lip, nor did his words speak aught but seriousness.

Arthur Ames cast a covert glance at his visitor. But, he was an adept in concealing his emotions. He smiled blandly, as he said:

"Glad to see you, Arlington; but you startled me somewhat, for I was not expecting you. Will you smoke?" and he half-arose as he spoke.

"Thank you, no," and Arlington's voice was serious and calm. "I came on business. I never smoke unless all care is removed from me. Besides that, the fumes of tobacco might not be pleasant to the delicate senses of your daughter, and— Is she well?"

"Well, thank you; she received your note duly."

"Yes; just twenty-four hours ago. I have received no reply, Mr. Ames, and am here now to inquire into the matter."

This was business indeed!

"You see, Arthur Ames," he continued, and his voice was stern and distinct, "in business, I am business; nothing more nor less. Our business of two nights since, was serious; it should not be so soon forgotten. Your copy of the agreement should keep the transaction well in mind."

"I spoke to Minerva," said the old man, in a low voice, "and told her of my obligations to you. She did—"

"I hope you did not tell her the whole truth," hastily interrupted Malcolm Arlington.

"Oh, no! I told her a tale of my own making, and—"

"Good! for I would not have my future wife to know that she has such a knave for a father! Nay, do not frown at me; I am speaking the truth. If you doubt it, we'll annul the agreement, and I will submit the facts in my possession to an impartial jury—the public. What say you?"

"There, there, Arlington, do not speak in that manner. I am guilty I know. I am dependent on you for—"

Just then a noise was heard in the small back room adjoining the parlor.

Old Ames looked hastily in that direction; then springing to his feet, he ran to the door, flung it open, and gazed into the little room.

He caught sight of the skirt of a female dress disappearing through a side door into the hall.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE EAVESDROPPER.

SUMMONING every effort, Arthur Ames controlled himself and returned to his seat.

"The wind flurried in through the window," he said; "that was all."

Malcolm Arlington looked at him keenly, but he said nothing.

Several moments elapsed in silence. But the iron-gray man had come on business; he glanced at his watch, and said:

"Failing to get an answer, I have come, Mr. Ames, to see you about it. I have a plan of my own. I want to hear from your daughter's lips, that she will accept me as her suitor. I do not wish her to tell me so, for I honestly love her—love her more than I do my soul's salvation, and I would woo and win—would prove to her that, though I am rough and pointed in my speech, a thorough man of business, yet, that I have a tender, warm and loving heart, which, in return for her love, I can give her."

He paused. His words had grown hot, and a generous glow had come to his smooth-shaven cheeks.

Old Ames looked at him, as if expecting him to proceed.

"Now, place me somewhere so that I can hear and not be seen; then send for Minerva and have an interview with her. In the conversation, bring about the point I desire."

"I hate to do a thing of this sort, Mr. Arlington," said old Ames, after a brief pause. "I may be a bad man, but I am that girl's father, and it looks like putting a spy on her actions."

"I admire you for those words, Ames," Arlington said; "but trust to my honor in this case. Remember, I love Minerva not less than you do."

"It shall be as you wish, sir. Retire to that room; there you can hear all."

Without a word, Malcolm Arlington arose and withdrew to the apartment to which we have referred.

As soon as he was gone, Mr. Ames struck a hand-bell. A servant appeared.

"Tell Miss Ames that I wish to speak with her."

"Yes, sir."

In a few moments, Minerva entered the room. Her face was flushed and her hands were nervous and unsteady, as she arranged the folds of her hair. She glanced hurriedly around her; she evidently expected to see some one.

"Why, father, where is Malcolm Ar—Mr. Arlington?"

"Mr. Arlington? How knew you he was here?" and the old man scanned her face closely.

"I—I saw him from my window. He came this way; then I heard the bell jingle."

She spoke innocently; but, what was strange for her, she cast her eyes down.

"Mr. Arlington was here, my child, but he has gone," and he watched her covertly.

"Gone! Strange that I did not hear the door, and—but, did he ask for me?" and she looked straight at her father.

"He asked kindly after you, Minerva, but did not express a wish to see you. He said he would call this evening, you remember, and—"

"This evening! Oh! I had forgotten!" and the girl started, as an anxious shade came to her face.

"What disturbs you, my child? You know that Mr. Arlington notified you he would call this evening."

Old Ames' voice was lower and more subdued.

"I know, father; but I will be busy till half-past nine, and I would see Mr. Arlington as became him as my future lover."

"That hour will suit him," said Mr. Ames, in a loud, quick tone; "and so, Minerva, you have concluded to make your old father happy; you have concluded to accept Mr. Arlington? Heaven bless you, my child! Mr. Arlington is a noble gentleman, and—"

"Yes, father, he is, I know, in every way worthy of me, and—and—for the sake of both of us, I hope I can learn to love him."

"Thanks! thanks, my child! Again may Heaven bless you, and—"

"But, father, why did you send for me?"

The question was so sudden it took old Ames by surprise. He stammered; his face reddened. But a bright look came to his eyes as a sudden memory flashed over him.

"I sent for you, to say, my child, that I would be absent this evening, perhaps, until a late hour of the night, and that you need not be uneasy about—"

"Why, father," interrupted the girl, "Mr. Arlington is to come, you know. What will he think, and how will it look—"

"Pshaw! my daughter, Malcolm Arlington is a gentleman. Then, as it may be late before he comes, I may see him."

"Very good, father; as you wish."

The girl turned and left the room. Once up-stairs

in her chamber, she flung herself upon the bed and burst into tears. The paroxysm lasted only a few moments.

She suddenly sat up.

"This is folly!" she muttered, in a half-hissing voice. "I can not avert destiny! The struggle has been severe. I am awakened to the truth. Lorin Gray must go! Had he money, it would be different. But he has it not! Unlucky fellow! Malcolm Arlington has money, and he has position. I am wedded to the world, and I can and will learn to love him! The die is cast, and to-night—"

She paused and bent her head low, as she continued:

"Yet, though I cannot love Lorin Gray longer, he must love me! I must have his adoration! Then, I'll tell him."

When Minerva had gone from the parlor, old Ames quickly let his visitor out of the little back room.

"What think you, now, Arlington?" he asked, as a bright smile flashed over his face.

"That you have kept your word, and that you can command me, my silence, and my purse," was the enthusiastic reply.

"I am pleased then, and—"

"Pardon me, I must hurry home, Mr. Ames. I'll take the dear girl at her word. I'll be here about half-past nine. Good-by," and with a proud smile of victory upon his lips, and fires of enthusiasm glancing in his eyes, Malcolm Arlington grasped the old man's hand. Then, striding softly to the front door, he opened it and left the house.

The lamps were being lit in the streets of Lawrence, and the grateful breezes of evening flung the sand about hither and thither.

Old Arthur Ames stood in his bed-chamber. He was robed in a singular attire, a rough-looking garb, and he held in his hand a large, wide-brimmed wool hat. He placed the hat on his head, and gazed at himself for a moment in the mirror, above the bureau.

Then he hastily extinguished the light, and, hurrying softly down stairs, left the house.

At the corner of the adjacent street, directly under a lamp, he came in contact with a tall man. One glance at him, and Arthur Ames hurried on.

The other turned and glanced back at the banker's queerly-clad, retreating figure.

"Do my eyes deceive me," he said. "That was Mr. Arthur Ames, or I've lost my sight!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE DECISION AND THE CHOICE.

AFTER Lorin Gray had received the note that day from the hands of Black Phil, he did not seem like the same man. He went to his work on the fourth floor of the mill, as usual, and as usual did not idle. But, there was an abstraction and an absent-mindedness in his manner that was entirely unusual.

Black Phil all that day had watched him closely but covertly. There were times, too, when flitting about like a shadow amid the looms, the man's eyes would fairly burn in the face of Lorin Gray, and a shade of anxiety or fear would spring to his brow.

At such times he would shake his head and skulk, muttering, away.

Having obtained permission from the overseer, Lorin Gray left the mill at an earlier hour than usual, and hurried toward his humble lodgings on the canal.

Once in his room, he flung himself into a chair, and bent his eyes moodily upon the floor. Thus he remained for several moments, musing:

"'Tis unfortunate!" he muttered. "I scarcely know what to do. A letter from her, breathing, however distantly, a love for me! Strange, and yet not strange. I am a man—an honest man. Nature has cast me in a seemingly mold, and made me—not uncomely. Then, too, I stood between her and certain death that memorable day in the Salem pike. Yet, do I love Minerva Ames? I, an operative in the mills! Can I dare lift my eyes to her? Dare I face the frown of that proud old man, her father, who has intimated to me that my visits to his house were not desired? Proud old man! You were not too proud on that dark afternoon to grasp me by the hand, fling your arms around my neck, and pray God to bless me, for saving to you, your daughter, the peerless Minerva! You were not too proud, then, to crush money into my hand, ay! a whole year's wages in value, and bid me make your house my home! Thank Heaven, I would not touch the gold! I was proud, too, Arthur Ames; and I am proud to-day. Now you are cold, and you frown when my coarse boots stamp upon the velvet carpets of your parlor; you frown when I bow before the radiance of your daughter, and take her hand in mine. And why? Bah! Because I have not gold, because I am an humble workman! Alas! My honesty, my industry, my perseverance, my devotion to my old mother—she is such to me—my muscle and sinew, count nothing in your eyes, Arthur Ames! Well, well!"

He paused for a moment and turned toward the open window of his little room, looking out on the dark canal. But he faced about again, suddenly, for the door was opened and a little boy entered.

"Is this Mr. Gray?" he asked.

"Yes, my boy; what do you wish?"

"I have a letter for you, sir; here it is."

Placing the missive in the mill-man's hand, the little fellow turned and left the room.

Wonderingly, Lorin Gray took the letter. He glanced at the superscription. He started, confusedly, as the well-known handwriting met his gaze.

"Bessie! From her! Ah! I had forgotten! What has induced her to write?"

He opened the letter; another fell from the inside to the floor. He picked it up. It, too, was directed to him, but in a handwriting with which he was not familiar. It was sealed with wax.

First, Lorin Gray spread open the little folded sheet, and read thus:

"DEAR LORIN:—I send in this envelope another letter. On looking to-day through my father's desk, I found this letter bearing your address. I don't know when it was written, as I have not opened it. But, thinking it might contain something of importance to you, I send it. It is directed in my father's handwriting. Do not forget to come to-night, for, ah! I am so lonely. May Heaven always bless you, is the prayer of
BESSIE RAYNOR."

For several moments Lorin Gray held the letter, mechanically, in his hand.

"Yes," he muttered; "I had not forgotten her—poor Bessie. But, this other letter; I'll see what it is."

He tore open the envelope, drew out the sheet, and read as follows:

"LORIN GRAY:

"Dear Boy:—Something may happen to me any time; I feel it. I am getting old, and in the ordinary course of nature, my old hulk must soon go down beneath the waters of life."

"I am anxious about my children, particularly Bessie and Ross; Ralph is strong limbed and clear-headed. Besides, he is a good sailor. I don't fear for him; he can get along. But, dear Lorin, I am very anxious about Bessie. She is a young girl, weak, frail, helpless, and surrounded by wickedness. I have blamed myself for keeping her in the mill; but I had my reasons. However, when I am dead and gone, be the time near or far off, on searching through an old chest of mine in the house in which I live, enough will be found to keep my children, in future, out of the mill, and living comfortably."

"Another thing, Lorin; though an old, gray-headed man, Arthur Ames has shown a liking for my Bessie, a mere child, as you know. He may be honest, and he may be dishonest. Taking his surroundings into consideration, I believe the latter. I don't like the man. Twenty years ago some queer things happened, in which this old man played a part. 'Twas a long time ago, and the matter is forgotten. But I distrust him. Keep your eye on him, Lorin, and guard my child and her honor. I can trust you, for I have seen you tried."

"One more point: Bessie, though a child, Lorin, is old enough to love. She does love—a man. You are the man. I know it, I have thought that you loved her, and the thought gladdened my heart. If I am right, Lorin, you have my consent and blessing. But wait; wait awhile, till the girl has grown into a woman, and knows her mind. Remember my words, and may God help you to keep them sacred."

"Your friend,
SILAS RAYNOR."

This letter was dated just a month prior to the opening of our story.

A violent shiver passed over Lorin Gray's frame as he slowly refolded the letter, and placed it in his pocket. He clasped his hand to his head, and leaned heavily back in his chair.

"Good heavens!" he muttered, in a low, broken tone. "Clouds hover above me, and snares are springing around me. How can I act? Oh, beautiful, peerless, fascinating Minerva! Oh! goddess of my dreams! I must bow before you. Oh! sweet, gentle-hearted, sad-faced, orphaned Bessie Raynor, I must—"

He paused suddenly, and a wild torrent of blood rushed to his face. He gripped his hands in his agony of soul, and a deep groan escaped him.

"Father in heaven, teach me to decide!" he cried, aloud.

Several moments passed, and the strong man wrestled nobly with the thoughts that were rending him.

At length he became still, and a holy quiet rested upon his face.

"I have decided!" he said, in a low, hushed voice. "I must see Minerva Ames—I must, to her, pour out my love! I must ease my aching heart. I feel that I am worthy of her, and I believe she loves me. I'll not desert Bessie Raynor, nor forget the dead father's dying injunction. But, as Destiny beckons me on, so will I follow!"

As he spoke he arose from the chair and began to pace the room up and down.

An hour sped by, and night had fallen.

Lorin Gray suddenly paused in his monotonous, and, it seemed, never-ending promenade.

"I am resolved, come weal or woe! I'll heed Minerva's call and go! I'll break my promise to the poor orphan girl, all alone with her dead father—all alone with her wounded brother. All this I'll do for you, Minerva! The die is cast; I have thrown my whole hope of happiness into your hands! Oh, fling me not off!"

He paused, and as a sudden reproachful expression came to his face, he reeled away toward the open window.

"Yes, yes, I cannot deny it!" he cried, almost fiercely. "I am a coward; but friends nor devils, good angels nor bad, can make me turn back now! Oh! Minerva Ames, I am your slave!"

He flung his coarse working-dress aside at once, and began his toilet for the evening.

In twenty minutes he looked like a different person. His well-shaped figure was clad in a genteel, well-fitting suit; his long dark hair was neatly combed away from his broad, bold brow, and his black mustache was arranged to fall gracefully over the mouth.

He surveyed his image in the glass, and a smile of conscious pride—pride at his manly appearance, swept over his face.

The clock in a neighboring factory told the hour. "I must be gone," he muttered, "I fly to her, who, however high in society above me, I adore!" A moment more, and extinguishing his lamp, he hurried down-stairs and left the house. It was he who met old Arthur Ames, face to face, under the gaslight at the corner. In ten minutes after this meeting, he paused before the splendid mansion on Lawrence street.

CHAPTER XXI.

A TABLEAU.

A BRIGHT light gleamed through the parlor windows of the mansion of Arthur Ames, and the silken curtains were drawn aside. Within the richly-furnished apartment, every thing was visible, all the articles in the room standing out in bold relief.

Minerva Ames, grand, lovely and stately, was standing by the pedestal of the cheval mirror. She was gazing at the beauty of her fascinating face—gazing at her broad, white brow, with the thick, radiant tresses laid away from it, gazing at her flashing eyes and curling mouth.

This was the sight that made Lorin Gray pause, that made his heart jump and rise in his throat.

But, recovering himself, he turned again to the door; and as he muttered, "Oh! sweet, divine Minerva!" he strode quickly up the steps and pulled the bell.

A moment and the door opened.

As the young man disappeared within the brilliant hall, and as the door closed behind him, a dark figure emerged from the shadow of the house, and stood for a moment on the curbstone.

It was Black Phil; and, though still in the darkness himself, yet he was in a position to look into the parlor, and see what transpired.

For fully ten minutes he stood and gazed into the room. Then he turned abruptly and slid away in the darkness of the street.

"I'll show her a sight to-night, if signs are to be counted on! Things are working; I'll give them a little time. But, if this doesn't secure Bessie, and give her to me, or anybody but him, I'll—"

The rest of the man's sentence was lost, as he turned the corner and entered Essex street.

An hour after this, when, as we have stated, Bessie was called down-stairs by the rap, and when she had opened the door, no wonder she started back.

With a scream of terror, Bessie was about to fling the door to, but the man who stood there suddenly interposed his brawny hand and arm.

"A moment, Bessie," he said, hurriedly; "I won't keep you long."

"What do you want, Black Phil?" asked the girl, trembling, holding on to the door knob firmly.

"Just to say a few words to you, Bessie."

As he spoke, he strove to push by. But the girl barred his way, so that he could not get in, without resorting to actual force.

"You are hard on me, Bessie," said the man, and a tinge of bitterness was in his tone. "I came to ask how Ross was, and to tell you that in case you needed money, I—"

"Thank you, Phil, Ross is better," interrupted the girl; "and we do not need money. Good-night."

So speaking, she suddenly pressed her weight against the door, to close it. But the man anticipated her.

"No, no, Bessie," he said, positively. "I came on other business, too; and I must speak with you," and he still interposed his arm between the door and the jamb.

The girl trembled; she saw that she could not oppose this man, force to force. She dared not make him angry.

"What would you say, Phil? Speak on."

"Let me in, Bessie, and I'll tell you. Ah! you're afraid of me. I swear to you, Bessie Raynor, that you are the last person I would harm in any way, and you know it. No, Bessie, I'll not injure you; I love you too much for that. But—Well, all right; I'll tell you out here. You expect Lorin Gray here to-night. He is in other and richer company. Don't start, read this letter and you'll know where he is."

As he uttered these words rapidly, he thrust an envelope into Bessie's hand.

The girl took it mechanically, glanced at it, and, leaving the door open, spread out the sheet.

Her eyes flashed rapidly over the written words; and a low groan escaped her lips as she read, in a wailing tone:

"DEAR MR. GRAY:—I must see you to-night. Matters of importance, perhaps. I can not think the brave man, who once stood between me and danger, will refuse to come at the bidding of one who holds him in sweet and grateful remembrance. Come, and at an early hour."

"MINERVA."

Bessie dropped the letter, and reeled away to the mantle for support. She heeded not the presence of the dead in which she stood, as she heeded not the man who had brought the letter.

The shaft had struck her. She knew now where Lorin Gray was, and why he had failed to keep his promise with her.

"Oh, Phil! say this letter is your own making, and I—"

"My making! That's very likely! Bah! you know better. Come with me, Bessie Raynor, and I'll show you a sight which will cure you of your love for this double-faced fellow! Come, I'll protect you."

She glanced at him. Her face was a theater of struggling emotions. She thought of the lonely house, of the chest which was to prove so valuable,

of poor Ross, and his uneasy slumbers; she thought, too, of the stark, cold corpse!

But, love and jealousy were waging a fierce battle in her bosom. She would know the worst!

"I'll go, Phil! I'll go, though I die by the act!" she said. "Wait a moment. Poor Ross! I must look after him."

With these words, she turned at once, and hurried softly up-stairs.

A glance at the calm, marble-like, innocent face, so spectral, so pallid, told her that the invalid slept.

A moment, and she crept softly down-stairs again. Throwing a light shawl over her shoulders, she extended her arm to Phil, and said:

"Come; I'll trust you; let us go."

Phil closed the door, and with the frail girl hanging on his arm, he walked away.

Fifteen minutes from that time, two silent figures stood by the open window of the Ames mansion—one a man, the other a woman.

Suddenly the latter, as she gazed with bated breath into the elegant, brilliantly-lit apartment, uttered a long, wailing shriek, and sunk to the cold pavement.

She had seen something through the open casement.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PROPOSAL.

MINERVA AMES gazed at herself in the mirror—gazed at her resplendent beauty, and a smile of triumph came to her face.

"Yes, yes! The die is cast!" she muttered; "and I have decided. I have torn his image from my heart, and flung it away forever! Alas! he has not money. He can not give me the luxuries, the elegancies of life, in which I have lived and been happy. But Malcolm Arlington is rich, and he can do this. He holds thousands upon thousands at his command. What care I for the disparity in our ages? Bah! the world overlooks such, when there's money in the bargain. Why can not I do the same? And I so much at stake! My father's fair name; and, what is more, his fortune, and another huge Babel of gold! Oh, I must have it! I must secure all! Ay, I have indeed decided, and I thank Heaven I have been so bold. Yes, yes; I must have the proffer of *Lorin Gray's* love! If possible, this night, he shall be brought to kneel at my feet. He is an operative, a common mill-man, it is true. But where can one find a nobler type of the man, physically and morally—ay, intellectually, too? Alas, alas! Lorin, you must be sacrificed because you have not that lever which, *without a fulcrum*, moves the world! MONEY! But he is late."

She glanced toward an alabaster clock, ticking silently under a crystal shade.

"What if that dark-browed man failed to give him my note? Or, can—"

She paused, and an anxious, uneasy frown came to her face. But she resumed:

"Can it be true, as I have heard, that Lorin Gray loves that pale-faced thing, old Silas Raynor's daughter? I saw her once—a weak-eyed, yet sweet-featured, child. There is nothing grand or striking about her to attract a man like Lorin Gray. Besides that, she is as poor as starving poverty itself. Ha! ha! I'll not credit such an idle tale. Yet what boots all this to me, if I have given Lorin up? Oh, heavens! though I can not marry him, yet I would die to see him wedded to another! I love him tenderly, yearningly, down deep in my heart. But he must never know it! Strange about this girl, this child of the mill—she is nothing more than a child. That dark-faced man, who comes here so often, loves her too, if I can read human nature. Then, too, I've heard strange mutterings from father about her. Good heavens! what can all this mean? Is she a witch, or a fairy in rags—a child all the time?"

The door-bell sounded. Minerva started, and, despite all she could do, a deep blush mantled her cheeks, and her hand trembled as she half-clung to the mantle for support.

"He comes!" she muttered. "Be still, my heart; behave, my soul! First, a grand and lofty conquest; then, Lorin Gray, you and I cease to know one another."

She turned as the parlor-door opened.

"Mr. Gray has called, ma'am," said the servant-girl who stood there.

"Show him in, Mary."

Then the tall form of Lorin Gray darkened the parlor door. He entered the room.

Minerva Ames met him with a charming smile, extending her hand warmly.

"I am glad you are here," she said, with charming frankness. "I was beginning to fear you had failed to get my note. I was very lonesome."

Lorin Gray took the lily tips of her fingers tenderly in his muscular hand, and, bowing over it with the grace of a courtier, said, in a low voice:

"Thank you, from my heart, Miss Minerva. But you choose a strange messenger. Do you know the man who brought me the letter?" and he looked at her steadily though respectfully.

Minerva started just the slightest, but she replied, promptly:

"I know that the man is a workman in the Pemberton mill, where you are employed. He was an employe of my father, years ago. He comes here sometimes to see him—perhaps to consult him about his money matters."

As Minerva Ames uttered these words, a dark frown wrinkled her white brow, and she turned away toward a seat.

Taking a seat a short distance from the girl, he said, with a light laugh, and in the most respectful tone:

"A truce to Black Phil, Miss Minerva. I am grateful to him that he delivered your letter safely."

In a few moments they were engaged in a warm and earnest conversation.

Time flew by and the night was passing.

Lorin Gray, now seated close to Minerva, held in his hand an open album. His eyes were riveted on two photographs, evidently copies from paintings. The pictures faced each other in that richly-bound velvet book.

A singular look came into the young man's face as he gazed—a sad, sweet, yearning look.

"You are interested, Lorin," said Minerva, softly and familiarly.

"Yes, Miss Minerva," he said, at length, slowly.

"Whose pictures are these?"

The girl slightly started, and a faint tinge of red came to her face, as she glanced at the two pictures.

"Why, the gentleman was my father's brother—Bernard Ames; the other was his wife."

"Ah! I did not know that your father had a brother."

"Yes; he has been dead over twenty years. His wife died before him. Uncle Bernard was very rich, and—Why, he had only one child—a son. Poor little fellow!"

"What do you mean? Where is his boy?"

"Alas! dead, too! The whole family swept away! The boy was drowned accidentally in the river. I've frequently heard my father tell of the sad occurrence. And the money that the poor boy would have inherited went to my father; there was no other living relative."

Lorin Gray did not start, or show any sign of surprise. He simply said:

"Ah! I now see a family resemblance," and he looked her in the face.

His stare was almost bold; then it gradually grew into a soft, tender glance. He closed the album and laid it upon the table.

Several moments elapsed, when the young man said, in a low, emotional voice:

"I have thought it very strange, Miss Minerva, that you should allow me to visit you—me, a poor workman in the Pemberton mill."

He did not look up, but nervously edged his chair nearer to hers.

Minerva Ames trembled, and her cheeks were stained with deep blushes. But her voice was calm as she replied:

"Tis not strange to me, Lorin. It matters not what you are, where you work, or where you gain your living. You are an honest man, and you once saved my life. I can never forget you. My gratitude is yours always."

She had hesitated as she used the cold word "gratitude"; "love" was on her lips.

She watched the effect of her words, and her eyes brightened as she saw a deep glow spring into the face of the mill-man.

"Thank you, Miss Minerva," he said; and now his voice was husky. "Will you bear with me, listen a few minutes to me, to-night?" and his words grew hasty.

The girl looked at him in well-feigned astonishment; then she bowed her head in assent.

"I came to-night, Miss Minerva," he began, "prepared to speak—to tell you a tale. I will be brief. I know," he continued, after a slight pause, "that you are far above me in station, in society. I know I am poor, and that I occupy a humble position in the world. I am of obscure origin, too, though I know not what it is; and I work from the rising of the sun until the setting of the same—work for my bread. But, I am an honest man, Miss Minerva—one with iron muscles, and an unswerving resolution. I know I can carve my way in life, in whatever direction that way may lie. More than that, I have a warm, yearning heart in my bosom, a heart which I would, with all its love, lay at your feet."

Impulsively he caught her by the hand.

"Oh, Minerva!" he continued, in a wild, hot strain, "I can not keep back my—"

At that instant, a long, wailing shriek pealed in through the open window and fell on the ears of the two.

Lorin Gray sprung confusedly to his feet. He had not noted the open window, and Minerva had forgotten it.

A moment of awkward silence ensued, Minerva's face as red as the sunset sky; Lorin Gray, tremulous, pale and agitated.

The sturdy mill-man gazed straight out at the open casement. That wailing voice had sounded strangely familiar in his ear.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Could it have—"

At that moment the bell sounded sharp and clamorous in the hall.

Minerva Ames glanced quickly at the clock. Her face paled.

"Tis the other!" she muttered. "Half-past nine! Malcolm Arlington comes."

Lorin Gray had caught the last words.

"Malcolm Arlington?"

"Yes, Lorin; my father's partner. He comes on business. I must entertain him, till father, who is out, returns. And—yes—another time, Lorin, I will listen, and—"

"God bless you, Minerva! I understand you. I will be gone. Good-night. Heaven's blessing rest upon you!"

He bowed low before her and left the room. As he stood in the brilliantly-lighted hallway, he met Malcolm Arlington, tall and stern. The banker glared fiercely at him, but Lorin Gray paid no heed to him.

Another moment and he was gone.

"Now, Bessie Raynor," whispered Black Phil, as, in the dark shadows outside, he caught the falling girl in his arms, "you've seen enough! Come; I'll attend you home."

The girl did not reply. She slowly recovered herself, and clinging to Black Phil's arm, staggered away.

She had seen Lorin Gray take Minerva Ames's hand; she had noted that Minerva Ames did not resent the liberty. Lorin Gray was indeed lost to her! She could not compete with the banker's daughter. She could not look again.

Two squares from the house, a tall man strode by them. Bessie knew him not; but Black Phil, at one glance, ejaculated:

"Ah! the other! A pretty mess of fish, indeed!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SACRIFICE.

An hour before the events last given; in other words, a few minutes after Bessie Raynor had consented to leave her wounded brother and the corpse of her father, to go with Black Phil, a man appeared at the alley gate.

He was cautious in his movements, treading softly, and glancing around him in all directions. He strode at once into the alley, and disappeared in the dark yard. Then he stood by the window of the ground-floor room to the rear.

He paused and glanced up.

One faint light was burning; it came from the room of Ross, the cripple. Then the man peered through the window. A dull, subdued light was shining into the room from the one adjoining.

He gently tried the window. It yielded, and went softly up. The man at once entered the room. He trod very softly.

"The old chest is up-stairs on the landing!" he muttered. "I'll find it!"

He drew a small dark-lantern from beneath his coat, and sprung the light cautiously on. Then, approaching the stair-case, he ascended as stealthily as a cat. The top was reached.

The man paused and listened.

There reposed the old sea-chest, time-worn and battered. It had sailed many miles over the briny waste, with its old master, now past all sailing. But, for years past, it had been resting from its journeys. The old captain had owned two chests, very much alike; but the other was now far away in the northern seas, with Ralph, the sailor son.

The man glanced around him. He placed the lantern gently on the floor; then he drew from his pocket a key. He was trembling in every limb. He knelt down and inserted the key in the keyhole in the chest. The lock was rusty; it did not yield readily.

The man worked nervously. Suddenly, with a snap, the bolt shot back.

He started at the sound, and cowered down close to the floor, scarcely breathing. But, as nothing followed, he slowly raised the lid, and gazed into the cavity. He could see nothing.

Raising the lantern so that its rays fell into the chest, he again looked in.

Now he could see.

At the bottom lay a sailor's all moth-eaten pea-jacket.

Greeditly the man leaned down and grasped it. As he did so, his foot incautiously struck against the chest.

An uneasy moving sound, as of some one turning with difficulty in bed, was heard. It came from the room adjoining, the door to which was ajar.

Then a weak voice was heard, faintly calling.

The man trembled and listened keenly.

"Bessie! Bessie!" wailed the voice. "Water! water! I am dying with thirst!"

The man slunk and turned to fly. But he paused. A strange fascination seemed to hold him.

"Bessie! my sister, water! water!" plead the voice. No response.

"She sleeps! Ah! Heaven help me; I'll wait."

Then all was still; the voice came no more.

The man, shaking like an aspen leaf, seized the old pea-jacket, and hastily made a bundle of it. Then cautiously relocking the chest, he crept down-stairs, and fled through the open window.

Twenty minutes from that time, the dark figure of a man climbed over the wall to the rear of the Ames mansion, and softly drew near the back door. A moment and he had disappeared within.

Arthur Ames stood panting in his bedroom. He flung his disguise from him, and slipping on a dressing-gown, sunk into a chair.

"Glorious! glorious!" he muttered. "I've won; I must conquer. Oh, Bessie! you shall be mine. Oh, love! what will not a man risk and do in your service? Oh, blessed old pea-jacket!"

He paused, as he laid the bundle before him, and gazed at it.

Long and steadfastly he kept his eyes fixed on the old, time-rotten garment. Gradually he leaned forward; his eyes closed, his hands fell to his side, and his head sunk on his breast.

He was asleep.

An hour went by, then another. Still Arthur Ames slept.

Suddenly he started and sat upright. He rubbed his eyes and gazed wildly around him.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "A hideous, terrible dream! So fearful! so real! so life-like! nay, so death-like! Plain as day I saw the helpless child flung by a strong man into the dark river! I saw the black water reach forth its greedy mouth and swallow the innocent down! I saw the tiny outreaching hands, the white, childish face! Then I saw—naught but bubbles! But 'twas a dream—nothing but a foolish dream. The old pea-jacket! Emblem of my victory! Let me look for the papers. I want to be sure; then I'll lay my plans! A good night's work, and Arlington quieted and appeased, too! Ha! ha! But the papers! the deeds!"

As he spoke he drew the bundle toward him,

spread it out, and began to search through the pockets and lining of the old pea-jacket.

He paused suddenly, and a triumphant glow passed over his features.

"They are here!" he muttered.

He drew out a long folded paper from between the lining of the garment and held it up.

It was an old faded, rusty-looking document.

With trembling hands, Arthur Ames opened it. His eyes flashed greedily over the written words. In a low, husky voice, he began to read:

"This indenture witnesseth that for and in consideration—"

Just then a gentle tap sounded on the door.

Old Ames started, and hastily thrusting the pea-jacket under the table, having placed the paper he had found in his bosom, he turned in his seat.

The rap sounded again.

"Come in— Ah! you, Minerva? What would you have, my child?" and the father looked anxiously at his daughter.

Minerva Ames was dazzling in her beauty. Her eyes flashed, and her cheeks were aglow. There was a loftiness in her manner which showed her off to advantage.

She smiled half-scornfully, but in a satisfied manner, as she walked to a chair and seated herself.

"'Tis very late, father," she said, "certainly near midnight. I did not know you were at home. I was going to bed, and heard a voice. Then I saw a light under your door. How long have you been in?" and she gazed at him keenly.

"Why, some time, my child. I did not feel like coming down. I was tired."

The girl said nothing. At last she removed her eyes from her father's face, and with a half-weary sigh arose to go.

She had not communicated much; it was plain that she held something back. Her father knew it. He stopped her.

"Have you had company to-night, Minerva?" he asked, as in turn, he bent his eyes upon her.

"Yes, father, and enough of it," was the wearied reply, as the girl, resting her hand on the back of the chair, paused and faced her father.

"Who, my child?"

"Lorin Gray, and—"

"Lorin Gray! The impudent scoundrel! How dared he—"

"Lorin Gray is not a scoundrel, father, and you know it!"

Minerva's cheek kindled into a fresher glow than ever, as she uttered the words with dignity.

"Why, Minerva, what do you mean?"

"I mean that Lorin Gray, whatever his occupation may be, is a gentleman. Moreover, if he had money, none would be welcomed more cordially here, by you, than he."

"Let that go, Minerva," he said petulantly. "This man is not rich; 'tis enough. He must cease his visits here. The world will talk. But, was there any one else? Was Mr. Ar—"

"Malcolm Arlington was here, father," interrupted the girl, as her eyes flashed and her bosom heaved.

"Well, my child?"

"He came on an errand; he proposed marriage to me," said Minerva, in tones almost inaudible.

"And, my child?"

"I saved you, father. I accepted him."

And now her voice was a whisper.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BLACK PHIL'S AVOWAL.

WHEN Black Phil had accompanied Bessie Raynor home that night, he lingered for a moment by the door.

The girl had not spoken a word since after viewing that tableau through the open window of Arthur Ames's parlor. She had begged Phil to carry her home. But her unsteady, tremulous movements, her broken, pent-up sighs, which would now and then burst forth, told the man plainer than words what she was suffering.

He had endeavored to speak with her, but receiving no reply, he, too, had relapsed into a gloomy silence.

But he lingered by the door after she had said a hasty good-night, and after she had entered the house.

"Bessie," he said, in a soft, subdued voice, as he slightly detained her by holding her shawl, "you've seen a sight to-night—enough to open your eyes, and make you look at certain things in the right light. I have only a word to say, Bessie—only a word or two; then you can go."

He paused; his voice was almost a whisper.

In a startled, frightened manner, Bessie turned toward him. She trembled as she clung to the bolt for support.

"Well, Phil, what would you say?" she asked. "You know I have a wounded brother up-stairs, and—"

"Yes; I know it," interrupted the man, though not rudely. He, all at once, seemed to have grown tame in the presence of this frail girl, who was scarcely more than a child. He loved Bessie Raynor, this rough fellow—loved her madly.

"I'll only be a minute, Bessie; if you get tired listening, you can go."

Bessie moved impatiently.

"I know you are exhausted, Bessie; I know that you have gone through a great deal to-night—enough to try stronger nerves than yours. But now is a good time for me to speak, for you can compare my conduct with that of another man you know—one who has given you some signs that he loved you."

Bessie, still clinging to the door-knob, bent her head and listened.

"I know, Bessie," resumed the man, speaking more hurriedly, "that I am a rough-looking fellow; that I am old enough to be your father; that I am ill-favored and forbidding. I know, too, that I am not rich and can not offer you the comforts of a fine home; that I have been, at times, rough to you and Ross; I know that people who don't know any better say I have a wife already; I know that I am not as comely a man as Lorin Gray. Yes, Bessie, all this I know and confess. But listen, and I'll tell you something else I know: I know that Nancy Hurd is not my wife; that I have a good snug pile of money laid up; that I am strong-armed and full of spirit to work; that Lorin Gray trifles with you, and is false to you; that his heart belongs to one who, though she spurns him and laughs at him, still leads him on, that, in the end, she may fling him over; that I love you, Bessie Raynor, more than a man of my rude speech can tell, and that I would die for you!"

He paused. His words had grown hot and impulsive; he spoke sincerely, and his hand reached out and grasped hers.

Bessie endeavored to draw back; but the strong hand of the mill-man held her as in a vise.

"Answer me, Bessie," he urged. "Whatever be your reply, I'll begone at once."

Tremblingly the girl raised her eyes and gazed through the gloom at his face.

"Your words are so sudden, Phil," she said, and her voice was very low, "that I cannot answer you now. I feel that I am but a child, Phil, and you know I am surrounded by care and sorrow. My dead father lies in this room—" her voice sunk to a whisper—"and my wounded brother sleeps above. How can I think of anything else? But—"

She paused. Then, summoning her resolution, she continued:

"You may know this, Phil: whatever I may have thought of you in the past, I think better of you now. For your kindness to me this night, I'll always pray God to bless you."

Phil suddenly took her hand more firmly, yet still tenderly, in his, and pressing his bearded lip to it, said:

"May God, if there is one, bless you, too, Bessie! Good-night!"

He turned at once and strode away in the darkness.

Bessie tottered into the room, closing the door behind her.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "what have I done? Have I given that dark-faced man encouragement? Ah!—"

She paused and bent her ear.

"Bessie! Bessie!" wailed a voice up-stairs.

"Yes, Ross, darling; I am coming, brother!" and she bounded up-stairs. A moment, and she was in the sufferer's room.

"I am here, Ross!" she exclaimed, panting, as she stood by his bedside.

"Oh! Bessie! I am so glad to see you!" said the cripple, in a low voice of bodily anguish. "I am feverish, and when I heard you on the stairs long ago, I begged you for water, and—"

"Me, on the stairs? Why, Ross—"

"Yes, Bessie; you seemed to be at the chest."

The girl started at the word chest, and stared fixedly at her brother. She had, for the time, forgotten about that chest, about the secret wealth it contained, about the tale her father had told her.

"Oh, Ross, forgive me!" she exclaimed. "I was not on the stairway. You have been dreaming! I saw that you were asleep, and I went out for awhile. Business of—"

"Not on the stairway! Dreaming!" and the poor fellow rubbed his eyes in a bewildered manner.

"Yes, Ross; you have been dreaming. You had better take the sleeping potion left by the doctor, for—"

"How do you know, Bessie, that I have been dreaming?" asked the boy, interrupting her.

"I know it, Ross, because you talk so singularly."

He opened his eyes, and looked toward his sister.

"I was dreaming, Bessie," he said, calmly—"dreaming that same dark dream! I saw the vision again! Ah! I forgot; I did not tell it to you. It was a black dream, sister. Listen: a dark winter night—clouds across the sky—great piles of smoke rushing high in the air—a terrible crackling and roaring noise, sounding far and wide—only a few stars peeping from the black sky! A crippled boy and an old man! The boy flung—I cannot tell it! 'Tis horrible! But 'twill come, Bessie; all this will come to pass, when the leaves have fallen, when the snow has whitened the lanes and field! Will come when the year is dead!"

"There, there, Ross! Do not talk so wildly," and Bessie laid her hand upon the bare arm of the boy. She started as if shot.

The skin of that arm almost burned her.

"You are feverish, Ross," she said, sympathizingly. "The bandage is too tight. Let me loosen it," and she leaned over him.

The boy had sunk into a deep, though troubled sleep.

"Poor, poor fellow!" murmured the girl, as her eyes filled with tears. "He is very low; his senses are wandering. Oh, Father in heaven, watch over him and preserve him! Were he to die! And Ralph so far away!"

She sunk devoutly by the bedside, and, bowing her tear-bedewed face, prayed to Him who has promised a shelter to the shorn for strength and comfort.

This night, in the little cabin, far down on the banks of the roaring Merrimac, Nancy Hurd sat

silent and motionless. She was in the little room, with the window looking out across the waste of sand-flats.

"He's away again!" she muttered. "He is away every night after her, a child, and she with her dead father lying stiff and cold in the house! Phil is a brute. But, I'll not put up with this. Philip Walshe, whatever he may say, is my husband; and, yes, I swear it! she shall pay the forfeit! When? Before the setting of a half-dozen suns! Half-dozen? Then, if Phil goes traitor on me, I'll get that pile of gold, and leave him forever!"

As she spoke, she drew from her bosom a long, naked knife; she ran her horny finger along its keen edge, as a wicked smile lifted her coarse lip.

At that instant, the outside door creaked on its hinges. Nancy concealed the knife hastily, and sinking into a chair, feigned sleep.

Black Phil entered the room. He paused as he saw Nancy quiet in the chair, and a half-pitying expression crept over his dark features.

Walking up to the woman, he laid his hand gently upon her shoulder.

She started, and rubbed her eyes, in well dissembled astonishment.

"You—you, Phil?" she said. "I am so glad you've come."

"You should have been in bed an hour ago," he said, unheeding her remark.

"I waited for you, Phil; I wanted to see you. Where have you been so long?"

"On my business, which is none of yours."

"Phil Walshe!"

"Yes, Nancy Hurd, I've been to see Bessie Raynor, and she says she likes me!"

The woman shook violently; but, suddenly rising, she left the room, without any reply.

As she passed into the next apartment, however, she clutched her hidden knife and hissed:

"Her doom is sealed."

CHAPTER XXV.

SHADOWS AND REALITIES.

THE sun of another day arose upon the world. It saw a little scene of solemn hurry and bustle at the humble home of the Raynors.

Bessie, though she had only slept a few hours, was up early. Then a few neighbors dropped in.

At nine o'clock a hearse drew up before the door; then came a carriage—only one. Shortly after this, a meek-faced man, in a black suit and white cravat, entered the lowly abode with a solemn, kindly step.

The undertaker, in his methodical way, had set to work with his assistant, making the last arrangements. Then he signified to the minister and to Bessie that all was ready.

With bursting heart, the poor girl retired to her room. In a few moments she emerged from it, clad in a plain suit of deep black—her pretty, pale face making a painful, yet half-sweet contrast to the dark bonnet which surrounded it.

"God strengthen me!" she murmured, as if at last her mind was made up, and turning abruptly, she entered the room of her invalid brother.

Ross started as his gaze fell upon Bessie, upon her sable, dreary attire; then he turned his head away. Large tears forced their way down between the lids, and rolled down his wasted cheeks.

Bessie silently drew near, and placed her hands upon his brow.

"All is ready, my brother," she said, in a low, broken voice. "The hearse will move in a few minutes. I must go now. You are again better, and can rest quietly until I come back. God bless you, my brother!" and she stooped and pressed a kiss upon his bloodless lips.

"Oh, Bessie! Bessie! can I not look on his face again? Oh! can I not look upon my father again?" and his voice wailed sadly in the room.

A deep sob burst from Bessie Raynor's bosom. She could not restrain it.

"No, Ross," she answered; "it would not be safe to move you. God knows, my brother—"

"Enough, Bessie; I am resigned. Go."

"I'll kiss his cold, dead lips for you, brother. Oh! Heaven stand by me!"

As she uttered these words, she leaned down again and kissed him tenderly as if loth to leave him. Then tearing herself away, she rushed from the room.

At the bottom of the stairs, as she stood in the midst of the little silent company of five or six who had assembled, her gaze rested upon two newcomers.

Black Phil, dressed in his best attire, stood there; near him and to the rear, his face sad and solemn, and his eyes red with tears, which, despite his manhood, would flow, was Lorin Gray.

Both men simultaneously strode forward.

At that moment, the undertaker whispered softly in Bessie's ear that the time had come when she must take her last look at the dead.

Tremblingly she turned to the two men, and, as Lorin held his hand to her, she wheeled abruptly from him, and slipped her arm within Black Phil's, and they moved away toward the coffin.

Crushed, astounded, scarcely believing his senses, Lorin Gray clutched at a chair. All eyes were upon him, and it required his earnest resolution to recover himself.

Then the last look was taken; and, still leaning on the arm of Black Phil, and preceded by the minister, Bessie walked out to the carriage.

Recovering from his stupor, Lorin Gray suddenly strode through the room and out into the street.

In a moment he stood by Bessie at the carriage-door.

"Bessie! Bessie!" he whispered, in a voice of agony, "I am your friend. Tell me, what does all this mean? I—"

She turned toward him and held up her hand, thus interrupting him. But she spoke no word. Then, with quiet dignity, she ascended to the carriage, aided by Black Phil and the minister. The clergyman followed. Then Black Phil.

As the latter entered, his face was lit up by a diabolical sneer of triumph, as his eyes blazed defiantly at Lorin Gray.

The coffin was borne solemnly forth and deposited in the hearse. Then the little procession moved softly off.

Lorin Gray's bosom heaved; his face paled, and he strode away at a headlong pace.

The hearse and the single accompanying carriage wound their way along Newburg street until they reached Methuen. Into this they turned.

As the carriage reached Appleton street, a coarsely-clad woman standing on the corner started and gazed into it at the occupants. With a low exclamation of anger, she turned and strode back to Canal street.

The cemetery was reached. Then, after some delay, the coffin was lowered into the grave, and the minister, in solemn tones, committed the "dust to dust."

Then all was over, and Bessie Raynor felt that almost all light had gone out from her.

After having seen the carriage and those who rode in it to Silas Raynor's funeral, Nancy Hurd—for she it was—turned up Canal street, and, in a few moments, paused by the front door of the Raynor home. She glanced around her. Nobody was observing her.

She tried the door-knob; it yielded. A moment, and she was inside. She paused and listened.

Then a faint voice wailed down stairs from above:

"Who's there?"

Nancy Hurd did not answer, but turned to the staircase, and strode boldly up. A moment, and she stood in the room of the cripple.

Ross started, and looked at her with great, wondering eyes. But then, a pleasant expression settled on his thin, wan face, and he smiled.

"Ah! Nancy, is it you? How kind in you!" and he held his unhurt hand toward her.

The change which came into the woman's face was remarkable. A softness—a real yearning, motherly expression was there, as she walked to the bed, and took his wasted hand in hers. Then she bent over him, and a tear came to her eye.

"Poor Ross!" she murmured, "I am sorry you are hurt. I was coming by, and concluded to stop in and see you. But, is Bessie in her room?"

"No, Bessie has gone to—the funeral," and the poor fellow broke down.

"Ah! I thought I heard her in the room there."

"No, Nancy; and since I've been wounded, she stays in the room here—through this door. She wants to be near me."

Nancy started. Ross had told her what she wanted to know.

"I simply came, my poor fellow," she said, "to say how I'd do, and to bring this jelly for you."

She drew from beneath her apron a bowl.

"Thank you, Nancy. May God bless you for your kindness to me."

"Good-by, Ross," she said, after a pause, and she held out her hand to him.

He took it, and held it some moments as if loth to let it go.

The woman noticed this act of affection, and as tears came into her eyes again, she leaned over him, and kissed him tenderly. Then she turned suddenly, wrenched her hand rather rudely from his thin fingers, and left the apartment.

At a later hour, when Bessie Raynor returned from her sad trip to the desolate cemetery, she started as she alighted from the carriage in front of her humble home; for, just as she had thanked Black Phil for his kindness, she chanced to glance toward the adjacent street corner.

She saw there a form she could not mistake—a bowed, though manly form, with a sad, ghastly face. A moment, however, and it had gone.

Bessie Raynor knew it was Lorin Gray, and, do what she could, as she caught sight of his bended, woe-begone figure, and of his sad, reproaching face, she could not prevent the flutter in her bosom, and the aching of her heart.

Then, as the carriage rolled away, without further notice of Black Phil, who had also alighted, Bessie ran quickly into the house.

And Lorin Gray, who, with bated breath, had watched the scene—who, untiringly, had waited for her return, staggered away, with a heavy load weighing him down.

The day passed slowly.

A terrible desolation settled upon Bessie, and, in the silence of the sick-chamber which was disturbed by no sound save the hard, short breathings of the wounded boy, she bowed her head again and prayed to God for help.

Ross Raynor slept soundly.

Bessie arose, leaned over him, and gently kissed his brow. Then she withdrew through the open door to the adjoining room.

In ten minutes, she was asleep—sleeping a deep, but disordered slumber.

The night wore on.

Suddenly, Ross Raynor awoke with a start. A smothered voice had broken upon his ear and aroused him.

He slowly turned his head.

The light in the lamp was still burning brightly.

Then the cripple saw a sight which, for a moment, froze his blood and struck him dumb.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MOTHER MOLL.

ROSS RAYNOR strove to speak, but, his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and he could not find utterance. He held his breath and looked.

A fearful tableau was revealed to the cripple's eyes.

Bessie Raynor was lying on her bed, in the room next her brother's, while above her towered the brawny form of a woman. In the hand of that woman a long, keen-edged knife was glittering.

Ross Raynor uttered a low groan and hid his face. Then, as with a giant's strength, forgetful of his state of weakness, of his prostrated form, of his broken arm, he sprang from bed and rushed into the other room.

With a low howl of rage, the fiend turned. She saw who had stood between her and murder. She sprang upon him, clutched him by the throat, and bore him backward into his own room, pulling the door to after her.

"Spare me, spare me, Nancy! Oh!"

"Ha! 'tis you, Ross," and the woman suddenly released her hold and glared at him.

"Yes, Nancy, 'tis I. Oh! do not murder me, do not harm my sister, she has never harmed—"

"Never harmed me!" she hissed, in a low, deep voice; "why, boy, she has come between me and my husband. She has stolen his love from me, and, by heavens! she shall die!"

She suddenly turned and strode back toward the door. But the same puny hand again held her back.

"Nancy, Nancy," whispered the boy. "Bessie has not done what you say! Oh, believe me, Nancy!"

and he stole his unwounded arm softly around the woman's neck, and lifted his big, bright, melancholy eyes to hers. "Nancy," he continued, "I know you love me, and, I know not why, I do love you, Nancy, though people say you are wicked. Oh! Nancy, we are only two, my sister and I; my brother, Ralph, is far away. Sometimes I think he'll never come back. Nancy, be kind to me yet, and spare Bessie," and he bowed his head on her broad bosom and wept silently.

It was a strange light that beamed over that hardened woman's face of bronze; it was a strange fire which gleamed in her eyes; it was not a wicked or a vengeful fire. Then, that fire was dimmed, extinguished, for a tear had sprung there and hid the sparkle.

A wild shudder swept over her frame; she stretched out her hand which held the fatal knife, the fingers relaxed, the weapon fell, and quivered on its well-tempered blade, as it pierced the hard boards of the floor.

Silently clasping the frail form of the boy, who clung to her, she murmured, in his ear:

"You have conquered me, Ross! You have driven back the wild, dark blood, which was filling my brain, and nerving my hand for a hellish deed! You have crept into my heart and made me feel that I am a woman again! Oh! Ross, had I had kind words oftener whispered in my ears, had I had gentle treatment, I would not be the evil-faced, wicked Nancy that I am. I was not always so. I can remember long ago, when— But 'tis an old tale, Ross, an idle tale. I'll not tell it to you, now. I must be gone."

She softly took away her arms, released his single one from her neck, and then, stooping, lifted him gently to the bed.

"Now, Ross," she said, "go to sleep again. Your sister is safe. I swear it. For your sake, I spare her. As for me, poor black-hearted Nancy, I'll suffer on in silence. I'll bear my burden, as best I may. But, Ross, promise me you'll say nothing of this. There may be time left for me yet, to do better, to do some good. Promise me, Ross, and I'll be gone."

She looked at him with her tear-bedewed face, and her eyes seemed to plead with him.

"I promise, I promise, dear Nancy! May God bless you! And Nancy, I know you will not care, I will pray to Him, that He may lighten your load, that he may bless you."

The woman gazed at his wan face, now lighted up with enthusiasm; she leaned down and imprinted a warm, passionate kiss upon his forehead. Then, seizing the knife, she was gone.

Bessie had slept unconsciously through all.

The next afternoon, or rather evening, for the mill had disgorged its living burden and sent them forth to breathe the fresh air, Lorin Gray strode across the eastern bridge and turned into the Andover road. A cloud was upon his brow, and with eyes fastened on the boards at his feet, he continued his way. Dark thoughts were filling his mind and racking his brain.

And Bessie, to fling me aside," he muttered, "for that dark-browed villain, for that man whom her father hated, who would have murdered her brother, who has a wife, deny it as he may. Oh! heavens! and she a child! But—"

He paused, as a sudden thought seemed to strike him. "Have I been true? Have I loved Bessie and Minerva, both? Do I love them both? Can I be true to both? Have I not told my love to Minerva? Oh! God! I have, indeed, been cruel—cruel to the poor child."

"But, I must hurry on. My poor old mother, I have neglected her, I have put her from my memory. But, to-night I'll see her and will make amends. Poor old mother, and she loves me so!"

Night had now fallen, but Lorin Gray, looking neither to the right nor the left, hurried on.

In a plainly, but comfortably furnished room of a small, unpretending house, nestled in the woods on the Andover road, some three miles from Lawrence, sat an old woman—a strange, mysterious-looking

woman. She was nearly seventy years of age, and her long, white hair smoothed softly away from her forehead fell, unrestrainedly, in a snow-white mass upon her rounded, age-bent shoulders. But the face, though wrinkled and tanned, scarred and seamed, as it was, in the long battle of life, was kind and wondrously fresh. Her eyes sparkled and flashed as she hummed an old-time distich and gazed around her.

She was clad in a manner that betokened she was fair-to-do in a worldly way, or, had some kind relative to care for her and her wants in her old age.

A fire burned brightly in the stove; on that stove a plain supper was cooking. The windows were up and the doors were open; for, in addition to the heat of the weather, the stove rendered the room uncomfortably warm and stifling.

This old woman's name was Mary Gray, but she was commonly called Mother Moll. Singular powers were attributed to her by lowly people, and by some who belonged to the higher walks of life. It was asserted she had the power of divination, of telling of the past, and of unvailing the future. Some called her witch, others spiritualist; but Mother Moll unpretendingly, yet boldly, designated herself a fortune-teller. One thing is certain, it was by this calling that she had made her bread in her younger days.

Certain it is, too, that Mother Moll, of hearsay and authority were to be believed, had performed some wonders, almost passing credence.

She was the woman whom Lorin Gray called mother; yet she was not his mother in the flesh, and the young man knew it; but Mother Moll stood to him as such, having reared him and taken care of him from an uncertain, yet a very early age. She had fed him; had educated him as he grew up in the city of New York, and had procured a situation for him in the great metropolis. But, the young man longed again for home scenes, longed for her whom he called mother, and without her bidding he had returned, a fine, handsome fellow. Without her knowledge, he had obtained work in the Pemberton Mill; the fortune-teller, while she frowned slightly, had welcomed him back with open arms.

This happened a number of years before the commencement of our story.

To-night she sat with her hands folded across her bosom and gazed, sometimes out of the open door into the darkness of the gathering night; sometimes at the cheery glow of the stove, with the old-fashioned black tea-pot simmering thereon. As she gazed, the contented, happy look gradually faded from her countenance and an expression of brooding, foreboding anxiety took its place. Then she leaned her head softly down and bent her old eyes in a stare, on the floor.

"I have not read the stars!" she murmured. "I have not burned the black hellebore; I have not buried the deadly night-shade in vain! A vision rises before me! Oh! ye unseen powers! A terrible vision of flood and flame, of crushed men and women, of roasted children and gray-haired old men! And, my noble Lorin! Oh! heaven, the picture is dim! But, he struggles through it! And now, Bessie Raynor, now, proud Minerva Ames—Hal!" she paused suddenly, lifted her hand, and gazed toward the door.

A tall, manly form was standing there, silently, solemnly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LORIN GRAY AND THE FORTUNE-TELLER.

The old woman sprang to her feet, and darted toward the door.

"You, Lorin!" she exclaimed. "Come in, my son; it does my old eyes good to rest upon you! Why have you failed to come? why have you neglected me so long?"

"So long, mother? Why, it has not been ten days since I saw you," and, as the young man spoke he entered the room and seated himself. The cheerful light which glowed out from the red-mouthed stove fell full on his sad, serious face.

The old woman saw that face, and though she pretended not to heed it, an anxious, sympathizing shade passed over her own.

"Ten days, Lorin! and you only three miles away from me! 'Tis a long time, my son, for so short a way." The old woman sighed as she sunk into a seat near Lorin Gray.

A few moments passed in silence, the young man gazing abstractedly in the stove; the aged matron leaning her elbows on her knees, and looking him covertly in the face.

Suddenly she straightened up, and glanced him full in the eyes.

"You are sad, Lorin," she said, in a low tone; "I see it, and I know the cause. I can read the stars, and I know the secrets revealed in the fumes of hellebore and henbane."

The young man started. The words had fallen on his ears with a peculiar significance. He gazed his mother in the face.

"I am sad, mother; I am not well," he said.

"Then, my son, make known your complaint, and whatever it may be I'll find a remedy."

She paused, her piercing eyes never moving from his countenance. Lorin Gray did not answer; he seemed awed and impressed. His cheeks glowed, however, and his eyes sparkled as with an awakening life.

"I am not sick bodily, mother," he said, at length, in a low, hesitating voice. "I never felt better; I am strong, buoyant and active, but—I am depressed; I am melancholy; my mind is harrowed, and sometimes I wish I was dead! Then all would be over."

"Ay! ay! I thought so! Nay, I know so!" muttered Mother Moll, as she sadly shook her head, and

bent her gaze upon the floor. Then a tear-drop rolled down and fell on the coarse boards.

Lorin noticed this. He softly drew near the old woman, and placed his arm around her neck.

"Mother," he said, and his voice was low and tender, "you are all I have in this world to cling to. It does not matter that I am not your flesh and blood. You are the only mother I ever knew, and a dear, kind, one you have been to me. Now, mother, my heart is burdened; I want to unburden it to you; I want to talk to you—to tell you a secret."

He paused as he drew her aged form gently to him.

Mother Moll shook with emotion; her withered bosom heaved, and the tears, which were flowing, ran down like rain.

By an effort, she controlled herself, and returning the young man's warm embrace, she said:

"God bless you, Lorin! Though I am not your mother, yet, my dear boy, your own mother could not have loved you better. For two-and-twenty years now, you have been dear to me, and in that lapse of time, ties have grown up between you and me, which nothing can sever. Ah, Lorin, your story is a long one and a dark one. No one knows it better than I do, and when the time comes, you shall know it! Fear not, you shall know every word. But that time has not yet arrived—though it is coming! coming fast! When the golden splendor of summer has gone—when the dead leaves of autumn have fallen—when the snow king, with his mantle of spectral white, rides over the land, then, Lorin, you'll learn the black story connected with your life. Ah! my boy, you are not what you seem; you were not born to watch and tend a frame in a mill! And when you know the secret of yourself, which is locked in this old, seared bosom of mine, will you not turn from me, forget me and my poverty, and seek the joys and pleasures of the world, which your poor old mother can not give you?"

"Mother! mother! speak on now and tell me the tale. My affection, doubt it never! Yet, mother, that secret—oh! tell it to me now!" and he seized both of her hands in his and gazed beseechingly in her face. His frame was shaking, and his eyes beamed wistfully at her.

"No, Lorin, not now; for the fullness of time is not yet! The stars would frown upon me—the wild arbutus and the nightshade would smoke no more for me, dared I draw aside the curtain of the past, and show you the dark picture painted upon it! Ask me no further, but know that for you I would die. Speak on, my son, and freely; confess to your old mother, who, though her years are many, though her face is wrinkled and her form bent, can yet tell you the right way, and point a path which will lead you safely from the lanes of doubt and sorrow."

The old woman's words seemed almost inspired. Placing his chair so as to face his mother, Lorin again took her hand.

"I will tell you, mother. When I returned from New York, chance one day flung me face to face, in the Pemberton mill, with Minerva Ames, the banker's daughter. After that time I met her frequently. I learned where she lived, and often after mill-hours, though it was out of my way, I would dress myself in my best attire, and stroll by the elegant mansion. And as I went by, I always looked for a splendid, queenly face at the window. If I missed that face I felt sad. As time passed on, I found this custom had grown on me so that I could not forget it; it had become part of my life—and I almost always saw that fascinating face at the window, and on it, as I came in sight, a sweet, angelic smile always grew. Thus chance brought about a memorable period in my life. Two years ago, one night as I was returning from this house to Lawrence, in a rough place on the Salem pike, I suddenly heard the clatter of a carriage; with it the cries of a man were mingled. I turned and saw two frightened horses running away at a fearful rate with a carriage. The driver was unable to hold them back. It was his cries I heard. I did not hesitate. I flung myself in the middle of the dark road, and, trusting to my brawny arm, I nerved myself for the shock. It came, and I was hurled headlong forward. Then I heard a shrill shriek of a woman coming from within the carriage, and I shut my eyes and redoubled my strength as I still clung to the bits. The struggle was fearful. Enough to say, as you know, I conquered. I saved Minerva Ames's life. The next day I received, both from her and her father, letters of thanks, containing an invitation for me to call. Oh, Heavens! how kind fate had been to me! My day-dream had ended in a joyous awakening. I went; I saw Minerva; she smiled upon me. I went again and again; I became a frequenter of the elegant mansion. Then—I hasten, mother—I suddenly became awakened to the fact that I loved Minerva Ames. Ay! mother, start as you may! I learned that I, a poor workman in the mill—a man without name, family, or money, dared love the banker's queenly daughter. I could not stifle the feeling, the grand emotion which swelled through me. I strove to banish it from my mind. The awakening was startling, yet the idea preposterous. Then, as I could not stem the mad current, which was hurrying me on, I ceased my efforts and floated blissfully on its bosom. I fancied Minerva Ames encouraged me. Ah! Heaven! mother, I was convinced that she loved me! Only two nights since I dared speak my love to her, and she did not repel me. We were interrupted, but her eyes sparkled and her bosom heaved at my warm speech.

"Listen yet further, mother," he said, and now his voice was tremulous and lower than ever. "You know Bessie Raynor?"

He hesitated and looked at her.

Quick as lightning the old woman raised her head.

"Ay, Lorin, and a noble girl she is!" she said. "Her old father was as honest a man as ever Lawrence saw or will see. Silas Raynor was, in times dead and gone, alas! a suitor of mine."

"Well, mother, 'tis of Bessie I would speak. I will do so briefly and frankly. I have known her since she was a child. She is scarcely more now, though she has a woman's heart and susceptibilities. More than once has my heart warmed toward her and my blood has coursed along more briskly as I have held her by the hand, and gazed into her soft, dreamy eyes. In a word, mother, I have, at times, fancied I loved Bessie Raynor. Do not interrupt me, mother; do not frown at me. I must speak the truth. I say 'fancied'; I spoke truthfully; when I question myself, I find that it was all fancy—that I do not love Bessie Raynor."

"Do not love Bessie? And why, Lorin?" demanded Mother Moll, in an unnaturally harsh voice.

"Why, mother, I am not honest to love two women. If I love Minerva Ames, I can not love Bessie Raynor. I do love Minerva."

"You are a foolish boy, Lorin, and you would stand in your own light. Minerva Ames is not worthy of you, my darling boy—nay! do not interrupt me. Your old mother speaks what she knows to be the truth. I say Minerva Ames is not worthy to be your wife, and her father is not a fitting person to own such a son-in-law as you."

"Oh, mother, how can you talk thus? Minerva is soft, gentle and—"

"Granted; but she has a double tongue and a deceitful heart! Think you, Lorin Gray," and her eyes flashed, "that I can be deceived? No! no! I already knew the tale you have told me—ay! before you opened your mouth. And I know, too, that Minerva Ames is playing with you—I repeat it; playing with you. She would have your homage, but she would have Malcolm Arlington's money."

"Malcolm Arlington! Why, mother—"

"I speak the truth, Lorin. I tell you that, in company with that rich banker, she rode by this house not two hours since. Ha! the arrow strikes, does it? Yet 'tis a merciful shaft."

"Oh, mother! mother!" and the young man staggered to his feet.

Softly the old woman laid her hand on his arm and drew him to his seat.

"Listen, my son; I would talk with you."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CROSSING THE PALM.

BESSIE RAYNOR, this same night, sat by the bedside of her brother. There was a feverishness about his hands and face which made her solicitous in regard to him. Her habitually sad look rested upon her face.

Ross saw her gaze fixed upon him.

"Be not uneasy about me, Bessie," he said, in a gentle voice, as a faint smile struggled to his face. "Do not be uneasy about me. You know I slept well last night. The doctor said this morning that I was getting along well."

Poor Ross! he thought he was the only cause of solicitude in Bessie's bosom.

Bessie could not shut her eyes to the fact; the little stock of money they had was going fast. The funeral expense, though light in itself, had been heavy when the small amount in the house was taken into consideration.

"I am worried about you, brother," at length she said, "and I am worried about other matters, too. Ross, do you know we have not five dollars in the house? Alas!"

The cripple looked earnestly at her, and a shade of pain came to his face. But then a smile played triumphantly around his mouth as he said:

"Bessie, have you forgotten what you told me of poor papa?—what he told you about the chest, and—"

"No! no!" interrupted his sister. "I had not forgotten; but—" She paused, as her countenance darkened. "I have my doubts, Ross—I do not like to think of that chest. Something seems to whisper in my ear that we will be disappointed—that poor papa's brain was confused—that he spoke idle words—"

"Oh, Bessie, how can you talk so? Go now and open the chest. We will never go to the horrid mill, with its clatter and roar, again."

Bessie half started to her feet as her brother's earnest words fell on her ear.

"The key, Ross! the key!" she murmured. "That terrible stroke of lightning, it was then I lost the key. I have searched for it since in vain. But I'll go and look again. Ah! if we can find the old pea-jacket, and, in it, the papers! then we can be happy—we will leave the mill."

A fire sparkled in her eyes, and a deep glow of exultation, of high hope, of longed-for happiness, illumined her cheek. She arose and left the room.

A half-hour elapsed ere she returned.

When she entered the apartment again, Ross saw in her every movement the failure of her search.

"You have not found the key, Bessie?"

"No; I have searched high and low, in every nook and corner, for it. It is gone!"

"Break open the lid with an ax," said Ross, resolutely.

Bessie started at the proposition.

"Splinter the lid, Bessie," urged Ross.

His sister hesitated no longer. She ran downstairs, and in a moment returned, bringing with her a heavy ax. She seemed bent on taking the cripple's advice. She snatched the lamp and hurried out to the landing, leaving the door open. She placed the lamp near her. But she paused as she gazed on the old storm-battered, salt-stained chest. She thought of her father, of the many ocean leagues this old

chest had traveled with him, and a choking sensation came to her throat.

But she nerved herself. The bright metal flashed for a moment in the light and then fell with a crushing thud. The eye of the ax fell on the edge of the lid in which the lock was set. The lock, chain and hasp were stricken entirely away.

Tremblingly Bessie laid the ax aside and knelt by the side of the chest as she flung the lid back.

One look inside, and Bessie staggered to her feet. A low wail broke from her lips, as she reeled into her brother's room and sunk, moaning, to the floor.

The chest was empty!

Lorin Gray leaned toward his mother, and, now that he had unburdened to her the tale which was weighing him down, he looked her calmly in the face.

"I can tell of the past, my son," she began, "and I can read of the future. I know you do not believe it, and that you, with your book-learning, endeavor to persuade me to abandon my notions. *Notions!* Does not the past tell what I can do? Yet, of myself I have not the power; it comes from a higher source. But, listen, Lorin; do not smile at me or interrupt me. I will tell you of the future; I will spread before you a picture which you will understand. I do so, to warn you. I'll not speak of Bessie Raynor or Minerva Ames, though already I know their future. Suffice it to say that everything will work well. But, listen."

As she spoke, she arose, reached down from the mantle an old-fashioned sand-glass set on four pivots. This she placed on the floor near her, inverting it, so that the sand would trickle through the lower chamber of the instrument.

Having done this, she went to the dresser and took out a handful of salt. This, with a small quantity of charcoal, which she obtained from a vessel on the mantle, she laid in a shovel. Sprinkling over the little heap a tablespoonful of alcohol, she resumed her seat.

For a moment the strange old woman muttered some incoherent and half inaudible words to herself. Then, suddenly extinguishing the lamp, she lit a wisp of paper by the red coals in the stove, and applied it to the contents of the shovel, which she was now holding above the sand-glass.

Instantly a ghastly, sickly gleam blazed in the room, and lit up everything with a spectral, corpse-like glamour.

"Ay! ay!" she began, in a low, distinct voice, her head thrown back, and her eyes gazing at the up-curling fumes, "it comes again! A raw, windy day, snow-clouds in the air! The white drapery on the earth! Wild winds through the streets, and along the river! A mighty crash! A mountain of smoke, and then, oh, God! flame! flame! The sky red with the uplicking fire, and rent with piercing cries, and moans, and wails, and curses, and prayers! The pallid moon, shining ghastly on a dead, smoking ruin! Oh! God, shut out, shut out the view!"

With a sudden movement she emptied the contents of the shovel and arose.

Then, as she staggered for a moment, she wailed in the young man's ear:

"'Tis the PEMBERTON, Lorin. Shun it and be safe! When the show-king—Ha!"

She suddenly paused, and at that moment the crunch of carriage-wheels sounded in front of the house. The sound ceased: the carriage had stopped. Then a female voice, echoing like a silver clarion, exclaimed:

"This is the place, Mr. Arlington—the witch's house! Let us go in, and have our fortunes told."

Then, in reply, echoed the deep, full tones of a man, giving a glad assent.

Mother Moll trembled.

"Away with you, Lorin!" she whispered. "Quick! into the other room there, and listen. *She comes!*"

Lorin Gray turned at once, as a wild, fearing shudder passed over his frame, and strode into the apartment designated.

He had heard the words, and he knew the voice!

Just as he had closed the door, leaving it slightly ajar, two figures, showing dimly in the uncertain light, entered the room, in which remained Mother Moll. The old woman had just succeeded in relighting the lamp.

"Ha! what a villainous odor!" said Minerva Ames, as she entered the apartment.

"Yes, indeed!" echoed Malcolm Arlington, who stood just behind her.

"Your servant, miss and sir," said Mother Moll, humbly, bowing low. "What would you have of the old fortune-teller, that you thus honor her lowly abode?" and she eyed her guests keenly.

"We were out riding, good dame, and being near your house, we thought we would pay you a visit," said Minerva, smiling blandly.

"You can tell fortunes, I believe?" said Arlington, as a slight sneer broke over his mustached lip.

"I can," was the prompt reply. "Would you have yours unfolded?"

"Not I! 'Tis the lady who wishes to cross your palm."

"I am ready," said Mother Moll. "And as the seeing hour is passing, 'tis best to begin at once. Reach forth your hand, lady."

Minerva slightly drew back; but, placing a piece of money in the old woman's palm, she held out her hand.

Mother Moll gazed at the soft, tender little hand for several moments. Then, as she bent her head, she said, hurriedly:

"Trouble! trouble! fair lady! You have two lovers; to the one who loves you madly you are false, and soon will thus declare yourself; to the other, you have already given your hand. With this other you'll stand up in marriage. But—there'll be trouble—

trouble which you can not shun, and which nothing can avert!"

She ceased, and dropping the hand, turned away. Minerva Ames started back, and a dark shade of fear came to her face. But she controlled herself, and asked:

"And who is it with whom I will stand—who is it to whom I have given my hand?"

Arlington laughed low; but he suddenly became silent, as Mother Moll answered at once:

"To him who is with you now—to Malcolm Arlington—to whom you have sold yourself for money!"

Again Minerva started violently, and a still darker frown came to her face; but she managed to restrain her emotions, and asked once more, this time in a voice just above a whisper:

"And this other, the true lover as you would make him—who is he?"

"My adopted son! my noble boy, Lorin Gray!"

"Your, your son! Come, Mr. Arlington!" and Minerva reeled from the room.

A moment more and the carriage-wheels were rattling rapidly away.

Like a tornado, Lorin Gray burst into the room.

"False! false woman! False, deceitful Minerva! I'll know the worst to-night!"

Unheeding his poor old mother, and her uplifted, appealing hands, he rushed from the room out into the dark night.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BLOW.

THAT night when Minerva Ames sprang from Malcolm Arlington's carriage, at the door of her father's house, she hardly bade the banker good-night. She hurriedly entered the mansion, not asking her lover to come in. Her mind seemed occupied with some dark topic.

Mr. Arlington wondered at this strange conduct, and his brow grew black. He was recalling the scene at the old fortune-teller's was thinking of Mother Moll's ominous words.

Had those words startled Minerva? Had they turned her thoughts from him?

The image of Lorin Gray arose in his mind; Malcolm Arlington knew him well enough. A bitter feeling of jealousy took possession of him.

Had he—this common mill-man, a place in the bosom of the aristocratic Minerva?

The banker drove slowly away with these dark thoughts in his soul. He determined this very night to know more of the strange affair. He was well aware of an old-time rumor, that Minerva Ames held the operative in high esteem; but now, she had given him her heart and hand!

When Minerva was in the house, she hurried by the parlor, and ascended the stairs to her room. Within her chamber, she flung her hat and shawl upon the bed, and sunk into a chair.

After sitting for several moments she exclaimed, bitterly:

"Oh! Heavens! what can all this mean! Father! father! you are to blame for this! You have tied the mill-stone around my neck! Yet, ah! bright thought, is it too late, even now, to say nay to Malcolm Arlington? Can I not, at this late time, go back to Lorin?"

She paused as the thought came to her; a bright glow sprang to her cheek; a sparkle of enthusiasm and hope to her eye.

But, these signs of emotion passed away, as suddenly as they had kindled.

"No, no!" she cried. "The die is cast! I cannot relinquish my position in society; I cannot become the wife of a man who is unable to support me, in ease and luxury. My purpose is fixed; my heart is settled. I am—"

She suddenly ceased her murmurings, as the bell rung with a loud, startling clangor.

"Who can it be?" she muttered. "Father is out. Can it be Malcolm Arlington, distrusting my silence and queer conduct toward him? Come to chide me, to—Ha, Mary!" she exclaimed, as that moment, after a premonitory rap, the girl opened the door.

"A gentleman, who wishes to see you, ma'am."

"His card, Mary."

"He sent none; he seemed to be in a great hurry, ma'am."

"Ah! 'Tis all right then, Mary," and Minerva, dismissing the servant, arose. For an instant she looked like one bewildered. But she turned to the mirror, hastily rearranged her somewhat disordered tresses, and with a sweeping scrutiny of her superb person, left her chamber and descended the stairs.

She paused as she stood at the parlor door; she had heard the hasty, heavy stride of a man inside. Her hand trembled as it rested on the bolt.

But summoning all her resolution, she opened the door and stood within the room. She started wildly as her gaze fell on the tall, brawny figure of a coarsely-clad man. His back was toward her. But, at that instant, he turned.

"You, you, Lorin Gray!" she said, in a deep, indignant voice—a voice severe and harsh. "What would you have?"

The man strode toward her, his face a wild scene of contending emotions. A moment and he had reached her; then he was upon his knees before her. Ere she could prevent him, he had clasped her hand in his.

There was a bitter, yearning glance in his eye; but a storm of words was upon his lips. He could not quell that storm; it burst like a surcharged mountain torrent.

"Oh! Minerva!" he cried, in a voice of anguish. "Oh! darling Minerva, say that horrid revelation is false! say that the scheme was concocted between you and my old mother! Say that she spoke but to wean me from you! Oh! Minerva, I heard all, ay,

every word, every syllable! And I have hurried hither to learn from you the truth, to hear you brand the whole dreadful thing as false. Oh! Minerva, I love but you! I cannot live without you. I may be poor; but I'll work for you, slave for you. Say that you have not flung me off! Speak, speak, Minerva, I implore you!"

For a moment there was a bitter struggle in the bosom of Minerva Ames. A wild storm was sweeping over her, too. Then it was gone. The working, twitching features grew calm; the eyes became like stone in the steadiness of their stare, and an iron-like rigidity contracted her features.

With a sudden gesture, she wrenched her hand from his, and answered:

"Are you crazed, Lorin Gray? Or do you foolishly, madly dream that you can thus come into my presence and speak such words to me? Am I to blame that you should thus act? Have I, out of gratitude for a service you once rendered me, and for which money was offered you, falsely led you on? No, no. You are certainly presuming to make use of such language to me. Surely you have forgotten, that between you and myself, a wide gulf stretches; that you are a common workman—I, a banker's daughter. No, Lorin Gray; let me hear no more of this. I am the promised wife of Mr. Malcolm Arlington. Now, my good man, you had better be gone."

She waved him contemptuously away.

Lorin Gray slowly arose to his feet. His head was still bowed—perhaps to conceal the wild tempest of passion which was speeding like a hurricane over his face. He clutched his hands one in the other, as if by his giant's strength he would crush back the agony which was rending his soul. Then, as he reared his form to its full height, he raised his face until his eyes met hers.

Minerva Ames never forgot that look. She shuddered in her inmost bosom.

Then the man spoke.

"I have heard you," Minerva, and I bow obedience to your words. I did love you, as man never loved woman; but my love has gone forever!"

The girl started.

"I was presumptuous, Minerva; yet I never forgot that I was a poor workingman, and an honest man. I thought, too, that in this broad, fair land of ours, where worth and honesty, truth and virtue should be recognized, and where I know them to dwell, that the barrier which society and money have erected between the classes—between you and I, Minerva, might be removed. I was mistaken! I loved you honestly, not for the money you would have brought me, not for the position you could have given me; for money I can make, and I claim no other position than I hold—that of an honest, God-fearing man. But, my love for you has been crushed, forever crushed. It exists no longer. God knows I would be happy in seeing you happy, and that you maybe, I'll always pray. I am grateful for the kindness you have shown me, and for the consideration with which you have always treated me. I can never forget the hours of serene, unclouded joy I have spent in this house, in the sunshine of your presence. Yet, Minerva, I was deceived when I thought that I could love none other than you. The barrier between you and myself was too high to be climbed; I should have known it. Now, that it is reared still higher, even beyond where my vision can penetrate, my heart turns to another, the right one, as, alas! I have learned too late."

Minerva started violently as his closing words fell on her ear. Her face paled. Her eyes stared at him, and she strove to speak; but her tongue refused her utterance.

"There is a poor girl here, but one as pure and pretty as Lawrence can boast, one with a sweet face and angel's heart, who, like myself, is poor. She works in the mill, too. From her honest love I turned, long ago, to you. Her dying father gave her into my care. I have been wickedly false to my trust. I will seek her. Farewell, Minerva; may Heaven's choicest blessings be yours! I go to Bessie Raynor!"

"Bessie Raynor! Good Heavens! Oh, Lorin, I will—"

But the mill-man, suddenly seizing his hat, left the room. A moment and the front door closed.

He was gone, never more to return as the suitor of Minerva Ames.

The banker's daughter had sprung toward him as he uttered his last words; but, when she heard the door close, she sunk to the floor in a swoon.

Lorin Gray had not proceeded ten paces from the residence when, suddenly, a tall form stood in his way, and a strong hand clutched him by the arm. He started back, and, in a moment, had assumed the defensive.

"Hold, fellow, and answer me!" exclaimed the other, in a deep voice of passion. "I saw all through the window; I saw you take Minerva Ames's hand; I saw you speaking appealing words to her. Tell me how you dare do such a thing; tell me, or I'll chastise you at once!"

He strengthened his grasp as he uttered the words.

Lorin Gray's blood boiled in his veins.

"I know you, Mr. Arlington," he said, in a low, menacing voice. "But I'll answer you, nor any man by threats. Out of my way, or take the consequences!"

"Hold, fellow, I say, or—"

He raised his cane threateningly over the mill-man's shoulders.

Lorin Gray did not wait. He sprang forward, and seizing his opponent by the shoulders, hurled him, like a puppet, to the pavement. Without waiting to see the consequences, he strode on.

Malcolm Arlington, discomfited and defeated,

slowly arose, and shaking his clenched hand after the operative, muttered, in a hissing tone:

"By Heaven! you shall pay for this! Oh, Minerva!"

CHAPTER XXX.

STUNG TO THE QUICK.

LORIN GRAY, with his eyes fixed steadily before him, hurried on. He looked neither to the right nor to the left. He had almost forgotten, though only a few moments had passed, his encounter with Malcolm Arlington. His soul was full of wild passions, and under a sudden impulse, a sudden recollection of neglected duties, he strode forward, bent on the consummation of one object. He was soon in Canal street, and then on the smaller way, overhanging the sluggish water on which was situated the Raynor mansion.

When he had reached the humble home where Bessie and her brother lived, his heart beat tumultuously for a moment. He had undergone much that night, enough, truly, to try him, but his blood leaped madly along his veins. He would not stop now. He had been negligent of a holy task; he had not encouraged the love of a pure and gentle maiden. This night, this hour, he would make amends.

He rapped on the door.

It will be remembered that we left Bessie sinking in a swoon on the floor of her brother's room, after seeing that the chest was empty, that chest in which she expected to find her wealth, that which would take her and the crippled brother out of the din and clatter of the Pemberton mill.

She lay for several moments there, as one dead. The wounded brother could not assist her; he could not now summon that supernatural strength which enabled him to rise from his bed and stand between the vengeful knife of Nancy Hurd and his sister. He lay there and prayed God for help.

Bessie slowly recovered, and crept again to her brother's bedside.

Then, between these two lone ones a long, earnest, heart-confiding conversation ensued, and conjointly they lifted their feeble voices and committed themselves to His care, to Him who had promised shelter to the shorn and food for the fatherless. Then a holy calm rested over them. Bessie Raynor, worn out and exhausted, leaned her head upon the bed and slept.

An hour and a half sped by, when Bessie suddenly awakened. A rap had sounded on the door.

A shade of fear came to the girl's face.

"Who can it be?" she murmured. "'Tis late, and—oh! Heavens, can it be Black Phil? Heaven preserve me! In his hands I am powerless."

Another rap, louder, and as if impatient, echoed in the room below.

"I must go!" she continued.

Tremblingly she took up the lamp, and with an inward, heartfelt invocation for her safety, she stole from the room and descended the stairs.

In a moment, she was in the room in which her dead father had lain. The window of that room was up, that the apartment might be aired.

Bessie fearfully went to the door and opened it.

"You, Lorin!" and she started back, yet there was relief, a half-concealed joy in her tones.

"Yes, Bessie, it is I," he said, at once entering and seating himself, as if exhausted, upon a chair.

Bessie Raynor soon recovered herself; a hard, half-stern frown came to her face, and she turned away, as if to leave the apartment.

"Oh! Bessie, have you no word for me?" exclaimed the mill-man, noting her movement, noting her face, and he half arose from the chair.

"What would you have, Lorin Gray? The hour is late, and I am a poor, lone girl, unprotected, undefended, and a sad, broken-hearted occupant of a house in which death has lately been! What would you have of me?"

The girl's words were like ice, and they were spoken calmly, quietly, dignifiedly.

Lorin Gray recoiled; his eyes seemed starting from his head, his broad chest rose and fell tumultuously. For a whole minute he gazed at her, as she stood, lamp in hand, half turning toward him.

"Can you not speak, Lorin Gray?" she asked, in a severe tone, or have you lost utterance? Or," and her eyes flashed, "after seeing her, and basking in her smiles, have you come hither to insult me in my poverty? Speak, I say, and then—we had better say good-night!"

It came hard to believe that this was the meek-eyed, gentle-faced Bessie Raynor who was speaking these bold, cutting words of sarcasm.

Lorin Gray started violently. His face first reddened, then paled. How had she known of his visit to the elegant mansion on Lawrence street. Had she seen him there, that night, and heard the words and witnessed the scene? If so, then, indeed, was he in her power.

He arose and approached her, but she again drew away.

"Why do you shun me, Bessie? Am I a villain, am I a leper, or am I not, as ever, your friend?"

"My friend? Why, Lorin Gray, do you so soon forget? I say again, the time is speeding; the time is late. I have a crippled brother, as you—"

"Oh, Bessie, you are cruel! Listen to me, dear Bessie! I come to renew my old vows to you, to respect the last directions of your dying father. I come to tell you, Bessie, that whatever has been my conduct during the last few days, my heart is in the right place, now that my eyes have indeed been opened. Oh, Bessie! I was deceived—deceived by my own heart—deceived and led on by a woman, who would win me and my love but to crush me, and to scorn it. I have been rudely awakened. I now know that I did not love Minerva Ames! Oh, Bessie, you and I have been together for many

years; your father left you to my care; I will not bring discredit on that trust by neglecting it! Bessie, my heart is on fire, and I must speak! I love you, Bessie—you alone. Oh! say, darling, that you forgive me my waywardness; that you will pardon my transgression; that you will take me back again to your heart! Oh, Bessie, speak!"

As he spoke, he threw himself impulsively before her, and grasped her hand.

At that instant, a low, agonizing wail sounded faintly on the air and echoed in the room.

Then all was still.

But, Lorin Gray nor Bessie Raynor heard the wail, for the old tree in the yard was sighing dolefully.

Slowly the girl recovered herself; she had been touched and shaken by his appeal. She disengaged her hand from his, and, stepping toward the staircase, said, in a low, deliberate tone:

"This can not be, Lorin! Let the past be buried; but, you and I must walk in separate paths. A time was, when"—she hesitated—"when, I'll not deny, Lorin, that you were dear to my heart. That time has gone by. You have deceived me, Lorin; yet, for the sake of old times and the joys of other days, we'll still be friends. And now, good-night."

Without waiting a moment—not even to receive his parting salutation, she turned from him and hurried up-stairs.

The young man stood like one in a dream, there in the solemn darkness of the room. Then, as a great sob, which he could not suppress, burst from him, he murmured:

"Lost! lost!"

He staggered to the door, thence out into the inky darkness of the street.

That low wail came from Minerva Ames!

She had quickly recovered after Lorin Gray had left her father's mansion. A fire was burning in her soul. She could not remain in the house. "Bessie Raynor!" was ringing in her ears.

Headless of the hour, and of every thing else, she had stolen forth. Silently she had witnessed the encounter between her two lovers; and then, as Malcolm Arlington had turned off, she darted on in the footsteps of Lorin.

She kept him in sight, all the way, and, finally, saw him enter the home of Bessie Raynor. Then, through the open window, she had witnessed the thrilling scene within; and then sunk fainting to the pavement.

But, just then, a strong arm was reached out. It caught her, and buoyed her up.

"Be strong—be brave, Minerva," said a deep voice at her elbow—that voice, kindly. "I, too, have seen all. I followed you here. Now, darling, I hope you are cured of this fellow. Come; I'll see you home."

Minerva turned to the man.

"You are right—ay, very right!" and she fairly hissed the words. "If never before, now, at last, I'm yours, Malcolm Arlington! We'll begone."

The next day, as Lorin Gray, stern and sad-faced, stood at his frame in the Pemberton mill, a gentleman of dignified appearance approached him, and placed a letter in his hand. He said he would await an answer.

The mill-man glanced at the superscription, opened, and read the letter. It was this:

"MR. LORIN GRAY:

"SIR—In this country, all men are, or should be, equal. Looking at the matter in that light, I recognize you as my equal. I demand of you redress, or an apology, for the insult of last night. Notify my friend, Col. Thornton, who hands you this, to whom he can go as your friend. Or, an apology, ample enough to satisfy Col. Thornton, will be satisfactory to me. Respectfully,

"MALCOLM ARLINGTON."

Lorin Gray did not start or change color. For a moment he reflected; then excusing himself to Col. Thornton, he drew out a pencil, and taking Mr. Arlington's sheet, he wrote on the back of it as follows:

"MR. ARLINGTON:

"MY DEAR SIR:—There is no cause for quarrel between us. I *aid* love Minerva Ames, honestly. I love her no more. This is upon the honor of a man who never yet told a falsehood. I wish you and Minerva all happiness and contentment. We will not quarrel, sir. Respectfully, yours,

"LORIN GRAY."

That night when, in his office, Malcolm Arlington read those few scribbled lines in pencil, he brushed a hasty tear from his iron-gray eyes, as he muttered:

"An honest fellow, and a real gentleman, if one lives. By Jove! I pity him!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

A LAPSE OF TIME.

THE summer had passed; autumn had come and gone; snow-clouds had gathered in the air, and snow had whitened town, churchyard and lane. The "New Year," with its greetings and "calls," all had come and gone.

The year eighteen hundred and sixty had come, and we re-begin our story on the ninth of January, a day preceding one of the blackest, the most awful, the saddest, the longest remembered in the annals of New England.

Before going on regularly, however, it will be necessary, briefly, to refer to the history of our characters in this interval of time.

Bessie Raynor, as soon as she had made the discovery that the chest was empty—that the deeds to the house in which she lived—to the lands in Illinois, near the lakes—that the directions for finding the buried doubloons were all a myth—that this was but the chimerical fancy of a dying man, who, perhaps

for the weal of his children, doted on and had built up such an idea—as soon as her own hopes had been destroyed, her eyes opened to the truth, she had gone back to her old place in the mill.

Bessie was convinced, as was Ross, the cripple, that her father, laboring under a mental hallucination, had deceived her. For the chest was locked, and she had to shiver the lid, as we have seen; the key could not be found.

So she had gone to work in the mill, her old place being open for her, retained, as she learned, through the instrumentality of that singular personage, that wondrous admixture of good and evil, Black Phil. She had to leave Ross to attend to himself, trusting him, to a certain extent, to the kindness of the neighbors: several of whom volunteered to look after him.

Bessie often came in contact with Black Phil on her floor. The man seemed to hang upon her steps like a dog, and his keen, sparkling eyes followed her wistfully, lovingly, wherever she trod. He was not lacking in any attention which would show his devotion and love to the girl.

Though Bessie did not, as the reader has divined, love the man, yet his attentive conduct toward her, his many little services rendered in his own peculiar manner, which he meant to be delicate, won on her. Then, too, she dared not repel him. She was afraid of him. Where all this would end, she dared not even contemplate.

So, regularly, day by day, she went to the "Pemberton," climbed, wearily, her four flights of stairs, and earned her miserable stipend which supported herself and brother.

Lorin Gray, too, worked in the mill. His face now wore a continual shade of melancholy. Between him and Bessie there were only a few words, though, whenever he addressed her, his words were tender and his gaze yearning and beseeching. He had been frequently to the humble home of the orphans, on the canal, to inquire about Ross and to ask Bessie how she was getting along. The answer he always received was cold and chilling; it seemed that the girl's heart was frozen toward him, that she had banished forever his image from her bosom.

But Lorin still came; he remembered the old sea-captain's last injunction to him, and he would not desert his charge. Over and over he would read the letter of old Silas Raynor, which had committed to his care the orphan girl and her crippled brother; read it to strengthen himself in his resolve.

More than once, too, he had timidly offered money; but on such occasions Bessie had flung his honest offer rudely in his teeth.

Lorin Gray had never gone again to the Ames mansion. He had, on several occasions, met Minerva on the street or driving with Malcolm Arlington. At first, he had spoken quietly and respectfully to her, but, as she did not return his salutation, he soon ceased to recognize her.

As for Minerva, it seemed, indeed, that the sight she had witnessed through the open window of the Raynor home had cured her of her love or fancy for Lorin Gray, had alienated her entirely from him. She seemed happy and contented enough as she walked, like a queen, by the side of the stern-looking, aristocratic banker, whom rumor said was soon to be her husband.

But there were times when Minerva Ames was alone, when the silence and sadness and solemnity of the night drew around her, when, within the sacred precincts of her own room, that a shade of sorrow, of heart-deep regret came to her fair face, scalding tears to her eye.

With Arthur Ames the time had dragged itself slowly along. As usual, he went to the bank during business hours. But that was simply habit. The money in that bank was not *his*; the business there brought him no revenue. He had no interest there, save in noticing, and if possible, adding to the welfare of his expected son-in-law.

He had grown haggard and pale as the time wore away, and his step was slow, nervous and halting. Often, in the silence of his chamber, in which he kept his papers, he would start at the slamming of a door, at a tap on his panel, at the creaking of a shutter, and the rattle of the sashes.

Bessie Raynor, of late, had passed from his mutterings—perhaps from his mind. 'Tis true, several months before—just four weeks after burial of the old Silas Raynor—he had one night gone to the Raynor home.

This he did, after much stimulation with brandy. That night was one never to be forgotten by Bessie, for then, in an off-hand, yet trembling manner, Arthur Ames, this old, gray-headed man, had offered her—*marriage!*

Indignantly, unhesitatingly, she had rejected him, and ordered him from the house. Then a wild storm of anger had burst forth from the old man, as he told her of her poverty. Then, too, he had demanded the rent for the house in which she lived.

In vain Bessie had asseverated that her dying father had told her the house was his own, that it was paid for, but, tauntingly, the old man demanded the deed to prove it.

Punctually had he collected the rental every month; and from her hard-earned savings Bessie paid him.

As of old, Black Phil often came to his house, and the fellow became bolder and bolder, and more exorbitant in his demands.

Old Ames groaned, but Black Phil heeded him not; he simply reiterated his demands; and he always went away with his hush-money gains.

Malcolm Arlington was, as always, a business man—methodical, punctual, honest, and, of course, prosperous. Lorin Gray, whom he had ceased to notice, almost to remember, never came up before his vision to disturb him.

His marriage with Minerva Ames was fixed for the night of January tenth, eighteen hundred and sixty. Mother Moll was more serious and solemn than was her wont. Her eye did not sparkle so brightly as of old and her movements were slow.

She spent long hours bending over the smoking hellebore and hyssop, and when the moon was shining and flinging its shadows like white-winged specters through the bare branches of the trees, she might have been seen prowling through the woods, muttering and sighing, her head bent and her hands crossed before her.

And Mother Moll was often, before she sought her couch, upon her knees by the bedside, in prayer—a strange thing for her.

Thus matters stood on the evening of the ninth of January, eighteen hundred and sixty.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A POWDER FOR RATS.

It was dark night again, a dark, cold winter night. All was still, save the creeping wind, which, with its icy breath, swept along the frozen river, and crooned through the bare branches of the trees.

A light gleamed from the window of Black Phil's cabin. It came from the same lamp, the same window, the same room as the one in which we have before introduced the reader.

In that room, close to a glowing fire on the hearth, sat Black Phil. The mill had "let out" early that afternoon, in consequence of some new machinery having to be put in, including large turbine wheels. Nancy had lingered in the city and had not returned.

Black Phil's eyes were fixed staringly in the fire, as if from the glowing coals he was weaving fancies, as if from the ashes he was resurrecting black, buried images. His cheek was pale, and his dark brow was wrinkled into a deep, anxious frown. His thick, bushy hair hung in matted masses over his forehead and added to his wild, disordered appearance.

Near the door was a lounge; on it a coarse coverlet and pillow. The man had been asleep.

"Gad! what a horrible dream!" he muttered, after a few moments. "So life-like! so real! Yet, twenty-two years have rolled round since that night. Ugh! I feel the little black shadow here now, touching my elbow! Oh, heavens! and though old Marianne is frozen tight, I can hear coming up from its dark depths a low, ghastly wail! I feel that I am stifling! I know that something dreadful overhangs me!"

He rose and staggered toward the window. With a blow of his brawny fist he shattered sash, frame and all.

The cold air rushed in and filled the room with its freezing breath. The man panted heavily, as if he was drinking in the elastic atmosphere.

"I feel better," he muttered. "That dream was too much for me, and Nancy is away! A thought! Yes, to-night is a good time. The hour is not late. If anybody in the world knows about that—that matter, it is old Moll. She is a strange old woman, and has told of some very strange things, a long time before they happened, too! No one will be there to-night. I will go, and I'll learn from the old sorceress if she knows anything about this dark, terrible affair. I will have all from her, or I'll choke the tongue from her mouth!"

He did not hesitate long. Taking down a coarse overcoat from a peg against the wall, he arranged the coals so that they would not do any damage during his absence. He left the lamp burning, and striding toward the door, which led into the darkness without, he opened it. Ere his foot had crossed the threshold, a woman, bundled in shawls and coarse wrappings, pushed in.

"Thank you, Phil; you are clever to open for me," she said, with a sneer. Her face was red and her eyes were dancing in her head. The odor which exhaled from her parted lips told a tale.

"You, Nancy! and drunk at that!" exclaimed the man, starting back, as a deep, threatening frown wrinkled his brow.

"Yes, 'tis me, Phil, and I am not drunk," replied the woman. "I've got enough aboard to suit me when the thermometer is below zero, that's all! But where are you going, Phil? Ain't you tired enough, without going out again?"

The man did not answer. He pretended not to hear her, as he buttoned his coat around his throat and drew his hat over his eyes.

"I say, Phil, where are you going? Can't you hear me?" and the woman reeled toward him.

"I am going out to attend to my own business," answered the man. "So don't hinder me," and he strove to pass by her.

But the woman promptly and boldly barred his way.

"No you don't, Black Phil!" she said; "you've been away from me all the time, lately. I suppose you are going to see that pale-faced Bessie Raynor!"

Her eyes glittered, and drunk as she was, she stood erect and firm, as she asked the question.

A bright look came into the man's face. He did not want her to know anything of his contemplated trip to Mother Moll's. He took a cue from Nancy's question.

"What if I do go to see Bessie? As I have asked you before to-night, whose business is it? Get out of my way, woman! Ha! you dare me to my teeth! Then, take that!"

As he spoke, he suddenly struck her a violent blow on the side of the head, sending her, tumbling like an ox, on the floor.

Another moment, and without a glance at her prostrate form, Black Phil hurried the door open again and rushed forth into the night.

In ten minutes he paused, as he reached the road, and stood perfectly still, as a single-horse carriage rattled up and rolled by.

"A bold traveler on such a night as this! and going the same way with me!" he muttered, as he again entered the road and strode on his way.

Slowly Nancy Hurd recovered herself. With difficulty she staggered to her feet, and then sunk into a chair. A silence of some minutes ensued; the woman's heavy breathing, as her brawny breast rose and fell, alone being heard; but, by an effort, she aroused herself.

"Ha! ha!" she exclaimed; "well done for you, Black Phil! Your blow was from the shoulder and well delivered! Ha! ha! 'tis very well, Phil. I thank you for the stroke! It reminds me of my vow, and it nerves me to do the deed. Ay! Black Phil! I have sworn it! You and I part to-morrow forever! Ha! ha! *forever!* and Bessie Raynor can not go with you! First, the money! it shall be mine! Then, to-morrow, the draft! glorious! glorious!"

She again staggered to her feet and reeled toward the mantlepiece.

She began to press her hand on the wall, feeling, it seemed, for some hidden spring. For a long time she worked in vain.

But, all at once, as she suddenly, with an execration and a bitter expression of disappointment, leaned her whole weight against the wall, to her surprise and joy, it yielded.

The woman stepped back and gazed. There lay the large pile of glittering gold!

"'Tis mine at last!" she muttered, as, scooping the coins out, she concealed them beneath her dress, in receptacles already prepared.

The task was soon done. Then she broke the spring of the secret door, so that it would not respond to pressure, and shut it tightly in its place in the wall.

She drew near the lounge by the door and was about to cast herself upon it, but paused.

"I'll look once more at the sleep-maker!" she whispered.

Drawing a small package from her pocket, and opening it, she gazed at its contents.

"'Tis a good thing to have rats in the house!" she said.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

OLD MOLL'S VISITOR.

MOTHER MOLL, on this cold winter night, sat in her house, rubbing her withered hands over the stove, which glowed with a dull red color. The lamp was burning dimly on the mantlepiece, flinging the few articles of furniture into half-shade and half-relief, and casting over the floor grotesque, unseemly shadows.

Near the old woman lay a shovel, with a dark, oily mass in it, and by it, on a piece of marble, was a pile of ashes.

The room was filled with a faint, suffocating odor. She at length arose, and shuffled across the room to the window on the east. She flung open the shutter and gazed out at the quiet, sleeping world.

Far in the distance, the twinkling lights, like eyes in the night, marked the city of Lawrence.

Mother Moll gazed and suddenly started.

The great, blood-red moon, gleaming through the murky atmosphere, far away, at that moment broke through the edges of the tree-tops of the distant forest.

"Good heavens!" muttered the old woman, starting back. "*The moon to my left hand, and bare boughs between us!* A bad sign! DEATH IS TO COME! The time approaches, and the—"

She paused and peered sharply down the long, dull, gray line of the frozen, snowy road.

As she spoke, a carriage, driven rapidly, came into view. Quickly the smoking steed dashed along. In a few moments the vehicle stopped before the little house.

"As I thought!" muttered the old woman. "And I know who it is. Now, indeed, the time, the hour, the minute, approaches!"

She closed the shutter softly, lowered the window, and returned to her place by the stove.

Scarcely had she seated herself, when a rap sounded on the panel. Before she could respond, the door was opened and a short man in a long overcoat, with a wide hat drawn over his eyes, entered.

Mother Moll turned and sat erect in her chair.

"Arthur Ames! you are welcome. Enter."

The man started violently.

"How know you, old woman, that I am Arthur Ames?"

"I expected you. Again I say, welcome, and enter. But now, your business?"

He cast his hat aside and drew near the stove. "I am Arthur Ames, old woman," he said; "but it seems to me, as you know everything else about me, you should know my business, too," and he sneered.

The fortune-teller started; a snake-like, revengeful gleam came to her eyes and a rigidity to her lips, as she replied:

"I did not say that I knew not your business. Trust me, man, when I say I know *many things* about you, but my lips are sealed till gold has touched my palm."

"I came to get information from you; for that information I have brought gold with which to pay you."

"'Tis well; the hour and the place are propitious, the hellebore burns brightly, and the stars are clear. Cross my palm and speak on."

The old man laid several golden pieces in her hand. She bowed, as she said, half-mockingly:

"You are liberal, Arthur Ames, with *your* money."

She placed the gold beneath her girdle; then she arose, and bringing from the dresser at hand a bundle of dried herbs, she flung them on the marble.

"Now tell me, Arthur Ames, what would you have

me unfold to you—the past or the future?" and she gazed him sternly in the face.

"I have a fair daughter; to-morrow night she weds. Tell me if, in her married life, happiness and wealth shall be hers?"

The old woman, with a wisp of paper, lighted the herbs on the marble block. They flared up, and, in a moment, sent forth a dense volume of blue-gray smoke, which wound itself into fantastic wreaths, and floated away to the ceiling.

Her visitor started back. Do what he could, he was awed.

The old woman, still standing, closed her eyes for a moment, and said, in a low, deliberate tone:

"Minerva Ames will, to-morrow night, stand by the side of Malcolm Arlington and answer questions put to her by the clergyman. But—*there'll be trouble.*"

"Trouble, and how, in—"

"Interrupt me not, or the sight vanishes!" said the woman. Then, after a brief pause, with her eyes still closed, she continued: "Her after-days will be spent in peace, happily!"

She ceased.

"And money! money, Mother Moll! will my daughter have it? Speak!"

"All that her heart will desire she shall have, and in abundance!"

"Heaven be thanked for that!" murmured old Ames, as he bent his head.

Several moments passed in silence. The herbs were still burning and the smoke was still curling up in the room.

Mother Moll opened her eyes.

"Would you have more of me, Arthur Ames?" she asked. "You have paid me well, and the hellebore burns brightly still. The curtains are drawn, and I can see far into the future—far back into the past."

"The past! the past! Can you see into the past, and bring up its secrets again? Speak, woman; or are you but trifling with me?" and as his eyes glared wildly at her, he sprang to his feet and advanced toward her.

With an imperious wave of the hand, Mother Moll checked him.

"I can read of the past. Think over some old-time picture in your mind, and I'll tell it to you."

The old woman spoke solemnly; but now a bright glow had sprung to her cheeks and a tremor slightly shook her voice.

Old Arthur's face grew pale; he sunk into a chair and said:

"I recall a scene of twenty-two years ago. Can you tell it me?"

"Is it fixed in your mind?"

"Indelibly."

"Then listen."

As she spoke she flung another handful of herbs upon the smoldering embers on the marble.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BURNING THE HELLEBORE.

For some moments Mother Moll paused. She muttered some low, indistinguishable words in a tremulous tone, and kept her head bent over the flaring flame on the marble. The thick curling smoke arose around her frame and almost obscured her from sight.

It was a strange, inspiring scene, and Arthur Ames looked on with fear and wonder.

At length the old woman spoke.

"Listen well, Arthur Ames; the vision rises clear before me."

She paused.

"I am listening, Mother Moll; speak on."

The man's words were scarcely audible.

"Ah! I see! yes! I see it plainly: A dark night: clouds over the moon; the stars hid from sight; all dreariness, blackness, gloom! A few lights here and there, scattered in the sleeping town, telling that there are those who still linger up. At the corner of a black-looking alley, near the river, two men stand; one slender, well-dressed, white-handed—a gentleman; the other, coarsely clad, large-limbed, short, dark-browed—a carter. Do not start nor interrupt me! I command you to be still and open not your mouth, or the vision vanishes! The men converse in low, excited tones. They leave the corner of the black alley, and next are seen on a main thoroughfare, then on the steps of a mansion of some pretensions. They enter; they stand in a library; they speak again. Ink, and pens, and paper on the table. A contract is written and signed; money is passed from the gentleman unto the carter. They leave the library and creep up-stairs. They enter a room above. In that room a sleeping child breathes gently in a cradle; 'tis scarce three years old. Oh! how beautiful that poor, sleeping innocent, as it sweetly, softly breathes and tosses its little round arm above its curly head! On that arm a mark or a scar. Start not, man, nor dare interrupt me now! A moment the carter gazes at the sleeping child, ties a handkerchief tightly over its mouth, covers it with the skirt of his large coat and hurries out. Then from the house. On he goes. At last, far down by the river, where now the dam spans the sheet, the dark-browed villain is seen. He heeds not the suffocating, appealing wail; the quick hurried breathing of the startled innocent. He stands and gazes into the dark water; then, as a sudden determination seizes him, he raises the child aloft, and hurls the little helpless thing far out into the dark stream! Oh! God! A splash, a violent bubbling of the water, and then the pale moon creeps from behind a ragged cloud and gazes down. Good heavens, the sight! the sight! A little white face scared and wet; a little, tiny hand stretched out from the dark water and all has disappeared! All is silence! Oh! God!"

and the old woman staggered back and leaned against a mantle.

Arthur Ames, his face white as a winding-sheet, his eyes starting from his head, sprung to his feet. He strove to say something; then an unmeaning, gibbering laugh broke from his lips.

The old woman aroused herself, and strode toward him.

"You like the picture!" she exclaimed. "Listen further, then," and with her long, lean, almost fleshless finger, she pointed him to a seat.

Awe-struck, the man sunk back.

"Listen, I say, Arthur Ames! Far down the banks of that dark river, a small, dark object floats ashore. From the bushes a singular form emerges. The little object moves—"

"Woman! you lie! you lie!" exclaimed Arthur Ames, springing to his feet and rushing toward her.

"Back! man! I am armed!"

At that instant a low rap sounded on the door, not the front, but the one to the rear.

"Go, Arthur Ames," continued the old woman, speaking hurriedly. "Some one comes; it might not be safe for you to be seen here. Begone! and remember my words! Remember, too, that the reckoning day is coming!"

With the glare of a baffled tiger, Arthur Ames turned and strode hurriedly from the room.

Not until she heard the horse's hoof ringing in the frosty crust of the road did Mother Moll pay heed to the other summons.

It came again.

The old woman walked to the door, and opening it cautiously, peered out. Instantly, the door was pushed rudely open, and a short, burly man entered.

Mother Moll started back.

"You, Black Phil, and what do you want of me?" she asked, as a frown came to her face, a frown mixed with an expression of fear; and she retreated toward the mantle.

"Tis I, Black Phil, indeed, Mother Moll; but I am not here to harm you," said the man, respectfully.

"Then, your business? Quick, out with it!" and she spoke imperiously.

The man did not hesitate.

"They tell me, Mother Moll," he began, in a low voice, though he kept his burning eyes upon her, "that you, as fortune-teller, can unveil things to come and bring to light things of the past."

He paused.

"Whoever says that of me speaks the truth. Go on; what would you have of me?"

"Well, I knew of a poor child years ago, some twenty or more, that got away from its nurse and fell in the river. It was thought to be drowned; others since then have thought not. That child had a mark on its right arm like a scar. Can you tell me, if I cross your palm with money, if that poor child was drowned?"

The old woman gazed at him steadily for several moments, and then, as she jerked her hand away, refusing the silver which he held out to her, she said, in a deep, impressive voice:

"He who sunk by the moon's pale light,
Shall live again, as sure as the night
Follows the close of day!"

The man started at her strange, solemnly-uttered words.

"What mean you, Mother Moll?" and with a frightened look, he drew near to her.

"And he, though poor, a waif on the way,
Shall have his again, as sure as day
Succeeds the shades of night!"

Black Phil turned back; he gasped for breath.

"Then 'tis true! true!" he muttered.

"Flee, flee, Black Phil; flee from the bottled wrath
in store for you!"

As she spoke she waved him from her.

Without a word, the man turned and rushed from the house.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE "TENTH."

THE next morning, the morning of the tenth of January, eighteen hundred and sixty, a day to be remembered by many in Lawrence, by some who to this day wear mourning weeds in a sad remembrance, broke clear and beautiful. But, before the sun had risen, there was a dull, red glow over the horizon, which fell on the windows of the long factories, giving them a repulsive, blood-hued appearance—a glow, which with its stretching fingers reached high up into the sky.

It was, what most people would have called, an ominous morning; sailors would have called it an ugly morning.

But, the sun rose and dispersed the dull, red atmosphere; then the soft south wind, warm and cheering, blew along the river, melting the ice-fringes on the edges, melting the snow-crusted on the road, warming and cheering Lawrence.

Early in the morning, long before sunrise, Black Phil arose from an uneasy and troubled sleep. He had returned at a late hour last night, from his trip to Mother Moll's, and without bothering himself about Nancy, further than to notice that she was fast asleep on the old settee, he had passed into the adjoining room and flung himself on the bed. He did not remove his clothes.

He arose early this morning and bestirred himself.

"The old woman knows all about it!" he muttered. "I'll take her advice. I'll go! Ay, this very night I'll leave Lawrence; will go anywhere, so I get away from here! Shall I send Arthur Ames that paper I found in his parlor? He paused, as he asked himself the question.

"No, no!" he continued; "I'll keep it; it may serve me in the future, to have a hold on him. But, now, I've enough of his money to live a while on, twenty years at least. Twenty years! will I be living twenty years from to-day?"

He trembled as he paused.

"I—I sometimes think," he muttered, as he moved toward the door of the next room, "that I'll not live very long; I've felt a shadow come over me at times, and swallow me up. Then, I could feel unseen skeleton fingers grasping at my throat! Ugh! Yes, I'll take Mother Moll's advice—clever in her to give it to me. First, the money," and he laid his hand upon the door-bolt. He paused.

"No, Nancy is there now; I'll wait. I'll go up into the city and speak for a wagon to come to-night for my things. Ay, that will be the way!"

He turned at once, and crept softly from the house. In an hour, just as the blood-colored sun was breaking through the ragged gray cloud on the eastern horizon, Black Phil returned.

Nancy was up and astir, busying herself about breakfast. When the time came for her to go to the mill, she turned to the man.

"Are you ready, Phil?" she asked. She was very kind and bland. There was a marked change in her manner. Black Phil noticed it with wonder.

"No, I am not going to the mill this—"

"What! not going to the mill to-day?" she asked, suddenly and anxiously, turning toward the man.

"I didn't say I was not going to-day; you interrupted me. I was going to say I was not going this morning. But I shall be there this afternoon."

"And what keeps you away, Phil? You are sub-overseer, you know, and—"

"My own business keeps me away; that's sufficient, Nancy. Go on, and tell Mr. Thompson I'll be there this afternoon—that business keeps me away this morning."

He waved the woman to be gone.

Nancy, with a short, quick glance at him, left the house and hurried away. When she reached the bridge, she muttered, defiantly, as if her mind had been occupied with thought:

"No! by Heavens! he shall not escape me! I've gone too far, and my preparations are too complete!"

In fifteen minutes she was climbing the stairs to her floor.

Black Phil occupied himself all the morning in arranging his clothes and different articles about the house. It took him several hours to get everything in order. Then he packed his clothes, etc., in a large, common chest, with a padlock. Then he flung himself, with a weary yawn, upon the lounge.

The man was exhausted; he had slept but little the night before, and his work, this morning, had not been light. In a few moments his deep, stertorous breathing, denoted that he slept soundly.

Three hours passed before he awoke; when he did, it was with a start.

"Ha!" he muttered. "I came near over-sleeping myself. 'Tis pay-day, to-day, and I must draw my money! Yes, I want every cent. And, yes, I'll take out my pile now, my pile from the panel, where it has been lying and growing for many a long day. Yes, I'll get it now, and put it away. The day has come when it must be used."

He arose, and going to a closet in the room, took out a large, stout canvas bag. This he carried to the mantle.

He pressed on the wall. It did not yield. He pressed harder. Still it did not open. He paused and examined closely the edge that fitted into the wall. The indentation of a hammer or some heavy instrument caught his eye. He started, and flung his whole weight upon the wall.

It remained immovable.

Black Phil's face grew white; a tremor took possession of his frame, a quivering crept into his lips.

"Good Heavens! what does this mean?" he exclaimed. "I can not bear it; I'll know what's the matter!"

He strode into the next room. A moment, and he returned, bringing with him a heavy ax. In an instant, the ax circled around his head, and fell with a ringing stroke upon the heavy board. The splinters flew and the door swung open.

One look, and Black Phil, tearing his hair and uttering a horrid oath, staggered back, with starting eyes and pallid cheeks.

The place was empty! Not a single coin remained!

"Treachery! treachery! She has it! I'll cut her throat from ear to ear! Now, by Heavens, my blood is on fire and my fingers itch to clutch her throat! I must begone! all is lost to me if my gold is gone!"

Without stopping even to put on his overcoat, Black Phil rushed from his cabin, leaving the doors wide open. He strode on at a break-neck pace, looking neither to the right nor the left, but always before him. His gaze was bent on the Pemberton mill, as soon as it came into view, and from it he did not remove his eyes.

Before he reached the canal bridge, however, he paused; a strange expression came to his face, and he muttered:

"Nancy is a very she-devil, and as strong as I am. She is always armed. I must wheedle her, must be very unsuspecting."

Without waiting longer, he strode across the bridge and reached the factory. He halted a moment, and gazed at the workmen putting in the new machinery. They had just completed their labors.

That morning, Bessie Raynor awoke quite late. She started, sprung quickly from bed. The sun was shining through the curtains, and warmed and gladdened her cosy little bedroom.

"I am late, very late," she said; "and Mr. Thompson is so particular! I must hurry. Awake, Ross, awake! 'tis six o'clock and past," she exclaimed, as she rapped on her brother's door.

She hurried with her own preparations, and was soon dressed. After a few minutes, Ross, pale and haggard, and looking worn and wearied, appeared in the little room below, where Bessie was getting breakfast.

"I don't think I shall go to the Pemberton to-day, Bessie," he said, as he sunk, listlessly, into a chair. "I do not feel well; I slept badly, last night. And dreams haunted me—oh! so black! And that vision, again; the *thira time now!*"

He groaned, as he leaned his head on his hands.

Bessie crept around the table to his side.

"You are ill, Ross," she said. "Stay at home, and when the sun shines warmer, go out and take a walk. Mr. Thompson will think nothing of it, for time and again he has told you that you needed exercise."

"Yes, Bessie, I'll stay at home, and take a walk, as you suggest, after awhile."

The breakfast passed in silence. A shade of sadness grew gradually over Bessie Raynor's face—a feeling of depression and melancholy, she knew not why, slowly filling her mind. When she bade Ross good-by that morning, she returned, as if by an impulse, pressed a kiss upon his lips, then, she was gone.

When she reached the mill, she paused, as she saw a tall, stalwart form just ahead of her. Bessie Raynor knew that form.

He had almost reached the entrance, when she suddenly started forward, at a little run. A moment and she had reached him. She laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Lorin," she said, in a low, tremulous voice.

The man turned quickly; his sad, melancholy face lighted up, with a glow of pleasure.

"You! you! Bessie!" and he held his hand to her.

"Tis I, Lorin," she replied, in the same low voice, as she frankly took his hand in hers. "And I've been thinking, Lorin," and her voice was scarcely above a whisper, "that I have not treated you right, for a long time—have not been kind to you. Forgive me, Lorin."

A big tear stood in her eye.

The brawny mill-man's frame shook like a leaf.

"Heaven bless you, darling Bessie!" was all the answer he made, as he bowed his head over their joined hands.

Then, they entered the mill.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TEN MINUTES TO FIVE O'CLOCK.

As the day wore away and the sun came out more brightly, Ross Raynor drew near the door of his humble home, and opening it, looked out. The air felt bracing; it sent the blood tingling through his system.

The cripple put on his overcoat, and taking his hat, secured the door behind him, and left the house. He strolled into Canal street, and took his way toward the dam. He paused, for a moment, then he crossed the bridge over the Merrimack, and striking into the Andover road, he continued briskly on.

The pure, strengthening air was like food to the boy; he sucked it in greedily. He left the city behind him and still strode on. He thought not of turning back.

When he left his home on the little street in Lawrence, it was nearly three o'clock. When he paused, as he did, near Mother Moll's, he heard a clock from a factory away back in the city, boom the hour of four.

Mother Moll sat before a table in her room; on that table stood an old-fashioned inkstand with a quill pen sticking in it. Near it lay several sheets of paper and a package of envelopes.

The old woman sat with her arms folded across her breast, and gazed steadfastly, dreamingly, at the table, at the inkstand, at the paper.

A frown wrinkled her brow, and a brooding expression rested on her face.

"Yes, 'tis coming!" she muttered; "and nothing can avert it! The vision has come *twice to-day!* The hour of the ending of all approaches. I distrust Arthur Ames; he knows I have told a truthful tale! He is not safe. What will he do? I am an old woman, and a helpless one." She paused, then, after a moment, she continued:

"I'll do it! The opportunity must not go by. I'll go on. He, my darling boy, must know the tale! He must have what justly—"

She stopped abruptly, and suddenly seizing the pen, drove it into the ink, and drawing a sheet of paper toward her, began to write.

Old as she was, Mother Moll wielded the pen readily, and briskly it ran over the smooth page. Then, she had done. She flung the pen aside, and gazed, for several moments, at what she had written.

"Twill do!" she muttered, as she folded the sheet slowly and carefully, and inserted it into an envelope. She sealed the envelope and directed it, in a plain, bold inscription.

She started.

"How shall he get it?" she asked. "He must have it to-day, or never! I feel it. And to-night is Minerva Ames's wedding! Oh! heavens! How shall I get it to him? Ha!" she suddenly exclaimed, as, at that moment, a rap sounded on the panel.

"Come in. Heaven be thanked! You, Ross!" and she strode briskly across the room to meet the cripple, who, at that moment, entered.

"I was somewhat tired, and called in to rest a few minutes, Mother Moll."

"Heaven has sent you, Ross," said the old woman, hastily and as if her mind was set on one idea. "But

you can rest now. Here, Ross, is a letter for Lorin Gray. *He must have it to-day, or his life and hopes will be wrecked.*"

She forced the letter into his hand and almost pushed him toward the door. Suddenly, she paused.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "the vision again! Great God! 'tis the Pemberton! and my child! Hurry, fly, Ross Raynor, for now trouble, on black wings, is in the air!"

Wonderingly, fearfully, the cripple seized the letter and hurried from the house.

He had not taken ten yards when a carriage drove up, at a furious gait, and stopped by the fortune-teller's door. A man sprung out and hurried into the house.

That man was Arthur Ames. He had not noticed Ross Raynor, but the cripple had noticed him, had marked, too, the diabolical look which rested on the banker's withered face.

Instinctively he paused and glided back to the rear of the house, and placed his face to a window. A pane of glass in that window was broken. Ross Raynor saw and heard the following:

Arthur Ames burst like a whirlwind into the room. The old woman turned to meet him. He advanced upon her, his hand in his bosom.

"Now, old woman," he hissed, "I am come to know the truth! Tell me if that drowning boy, flung in the Merrimack, lives to-day!"

The old fortune-teller reared her bent form, and while her eyes flashed, she shook her lean finger defiantly in his face, as she thundered back:

"Ay, he lives to claim his own! Ay, Arthur Ames, the boy you would have murdered—the helpless son of your dead brother Bernard—lives to-day, and this day he shall triumph over you! The stars and the heliobore—"

"You lie! and you die!" suddenly interrupted the man, as, like lightning, he sprung forward, and, drawing a pistol, placed it to her temple.

A moment, and a sharp yet deadened report rung in the room, and poor old Mother Moll, flinging her hands spasmodically in the air, fell, without a groan, to the floor.

The vengeful bullet had plowed through her brain.

Arthur Ames, for a single moment, gazed at the prostrate form before him. Then a shudder ran over his frame. But, recovering himself, he sprung to the bed in the corner, hurled it on the floor, and taking a lighted brand from the stove, flung it on the inflammable material.

A moment, and the flames leaped up and began to roar.

"Well done!" he muttered. "Now the evidence is closed!"

He turned and fled, like a brow-branded murderer, from the place. Then he was in his carriage and clattering back toward the city.

Ross Raynor, stunned and stupefied at what he had seen and heard, endeavored to break into the house. But the flames which were leaping from the doors and windows drove him back.

Turning off, he reeled away, shouting "fire," "murder," at the top of his voice.

He had not proceeded a quarter of a mile before he suddenly paused and shrunk back. The very ground trembled beneath his feet, and a mighty collapse of air, as if some world-rocking earthquake had passed by, smote on his ear.

Then he looked toward the city. A dense volume of dust and smoke reared itself in a huge column toward the sky.

It was in the direction of the Pemberton mill.

Ross Raynor as he reeled on, saw the broad dial of a clock. The hands pointed to ten minutes to five o'clock.

CHAPTER XXXVII. THE GREAT HOLOCAUST.

LORIN GRAY left his loom and drew near Bessie's place on the floor. As he came along the "pass," it was easy to see that his face was solemn and serious.

The girl saw him approaching, and noted his sad, foreboding aspect.

They had not spoken further that day, since the few words as they entered the mill, in the morning. Bessie's pale face crimsoned, and she bowed her head and pretended to busy herself with her frame, as she leaned down.

Lorin drew near.

"Bessie," he said, and his voice was very serious, "there is something the matter. My frame does not work well."

She looked up in astonishment, but the anxious look left her face, and one of relief took its place.

"What mean you, Lorin?" she asked, in a low, sweet tone, as she gazed him trustingly in the face.

"I mean there is something the matter with the machinery," he replied, very earnestly. "I think it is too heavy for the walls. I fear something will happen. I wish it were half-past six, and we were safe at home."

As he spoke, he gazed at her strangely. Then, he glanced toward the clock, at the further end of the room.

The hands stood at fifteen minutes to five o'clock. At that moment, Black Phil appeared on the floor.

It was a strange smile, that which played over the man's face as he walked slowly along, a smile showing a singular admixture of emotions. He bent his head and strode leisurely along the room.

Lorin Gray caught a glimpse of the sinister glance in the man's eye.

Just then, Nancy Hurd walked from behind her loom, some steps away. She carried a smoking pitcher in her hand. A smile was upon her lip.

She met the man, her reputed husband, just by Bessie Raynor's frame.

Lorin Gray and the orphan girl instinctively cast their eyes upon the two.

"You, Phil! I was uneasy about you," said the woman.

"Is that so, Nancy? Thank you for remembering me. I promised you I would come. Here I am; but what's that you have in the pitcher?" he asked, suddenly.

"Good hot rum punch, Phil, and I've saved the biggest half for you. 'Tis good. Drink it."

As she spoke, she held the pitcher toward him.

The man gave a quick, suspicious glance toward her, he hesitated. But, after a moment, he took the pitcher and said:

"Kind in you, Nancy; thank you."

He placed the pitcher to his lips, and drained it to the bottom.

As he handed it back to her, he started. A burning, stifling sensation hung in his throat, a film came suddenly over his eyes. Dimly he saw a smile of demoniac triumph on Nancy Hurd's face. A sudden shiver ran over him. He reeled toward her.

"Nancy Hurd, you—you—have dealt foully!"

"My God! What is this! Fly! fly, Bessie! Look, oh! Heaven protect us!"

Lorin Gray tottered, as his voice rung high above the clattering of the machinery, the buzz and whirr of spindles.

He had felt the heavy floors vibrate under his feet, he had seen the yarn in Bessie Raynor's frame snap and fly toward the ceiling, that ceiling groaning, creaking and gaping.

Oh! heavens! the wild shrieks that rung, at that instant, from floor to floor through the great Pemberton mill.

"Oh! Lorin, save me, save—" She could say no more. There was a wild creaking of timbers, a loud, deafening, groaning of cemented bricks and mortar as wide rents gaped in the wall, then, a mighty crash and a stunning, deafening roar.

At ten minutes before five o'clock on Tuesday, tenth of January, the Pemberton mill, all hands being at the time on duty, fell to the ground.

In the words of one whom the author of this romance loves for her soul-stirring, heart-touching tribute to the memory of this great sacrificial offering:

"So the news flashed over the telegraph lines, sprung into large type in the newspapers, passed from lip to lip, a nine days' wonder, gave place to the successful candidate and the muttering South, and was forgotten."

Yes, such was the brief message that leaped in the lightning's spark over the broad land—such were the few words telling a tale of horror, at which the people of the great American Republic, from lakes to gulf, from coast to coast, shuddered.

The Pemberton mill, which on that morning had winked its many eyes at the rising sun—which stood like a strong tower in its might—which, seemingly, could have withstood the storms and floods of ages, had gone down in its pride, gone down to wreck and ruin, and death!

Quiet citizens sitting by their firesides; shop-dealers engaged in their traffic; laborers in the street—all held their breath, as the mighty shock caused their houses to tremble and their brains to whirl. And all rushed forth, fearing that some subterranean wave was creeping along beneath them.

Then they looked for the mills, one by one. *Pemberton was gone!* A great black cloud of dust rising above it in the air, to mark its place and its fall.

"Pemberton has fallen!" Oh! God! the cry!

Then, horror of horrors, there came a cry:

"FIRE! FIRE! THE PEMBERTON IS ON FIRE!"

We sicken, we turn shudderingly away.

Let us state plain, cold fact, as written in the words of the chronicler of the holocaust.

"On the 10th of January, 1860, the Pemberton Manufacturing Company had in its employ nine hundred and eighteen persons. Of these, nearly six hundred men, women and children, were at work in the large mill where the manufacturing operations were principally carried on. At five o'clock in the afternoon, with no previous warning, almost in an instant, certainly in a space of time not exceeding one minute, the floors of this large structure, five stories in height, suddenly gave way, the walls were overthrown, and stone, bricks, timber, machinery, and this vast crowd of human beings, lay in one confused mass of ruins. A few hours later a fire broke out and raged fiercely over the shapeless pile, and then, indeed, a thrill of horror ran through the stoutest heart, as the thousands, working with almost supernatural effort for the rescue of the unfortunate victims, were successively driven off by the flames and forced to abandon friends, relatives and neighbors to their awful fate.

"The tidings flew, with the speed of lightning over the land, and while here, at the scene of the disaster, every thing seemed forgotten but the care of the wounded, the burial of the dead, and the relief of the suffering families of the bereaved, the hearts of others at a distance were moved as on no other occasion, and charity with lavish hand began to pour its offerings upon our stricken community."

Bessie Raynor, far down beneath the debris of the fallen mills, her face scarred and bleeding, her dress torn, her senses reeling and bewildered, did not recover her reason until hours after, when she smelled the smoke of fire and saw the dull, red glow of the flames creeping toward her. It was nine o'clock at night.

Bessie glanced ahead of her. A wild shout from the gathered throng outside called her attention that way. She looked. She saw Lorin Gray, far ahead of her, rise, with a giant's strength, from the debris of fallen timbers. She saw him thrust the

beams aside which held him down, as if they had no power to hold him.

Then his voice rung like a clarion in the air.

"Bessie! Bessie!"

It fell on her ears. Her tongue at first clove to her mouth; then it was loosed. She found utterance.

"Here, here, Lorin!"

He turned like a lion. He seized an ax near. He rolled his sleeves to his shoulders, baring his brawny arms for the conflict—for the battle for a life.

Another moment, and guided by that sweet, clear voice, "Here, Lorin! Here, Lorin!" he dashed over the smoking brick over the splintered timbers. He reached the spot. A giant's task was before him, but he quailed not before it. Far down under the interlocked beams he caught sight of the pale, white face of her whom he loved.

The ax twinkled in the up-creeping glow, and its heavy blows rung over the roar and the din. On and on he worked with his lungs of leather and his muscles of iron. On and on!

He was in reaching distance of her. A heavy girder of iron stopped him. It, alone, stood between him and her, between her and life! He nerved himself for the mighty work, for the work of six men. He laid his ax aside; he leaped down into the hole he had cut. A moment, and his shoulder was against the girder.

Oh! Heavens! the fearful strain. Another mighty effort; the solid girder moved; another, and oh! Heaven be thanked, it slid away and fell by its own weight. In an instant he had grasped the precious burden in his arms. Another, and he had reeled away from the coming death, bearing with him the fainting form of the orphan girl.

Ere the wild, enthusiastic cheer which broke from the swaying, surging crowd had died away, Lorin Gray paused.

He had heard a loud voice calling him, one he knew, one he dared not pass unheeded. His face worked.

"He is a fellow-creature!" he muttered. "I'll save him, though his sins are as scarlet! Take Bessie Raynor," and he half thrust her into the arms of a hardy mill-man who stood by.

He turned again toward the smoking, glaring pile.

"Lorin Gray! Lorin Gray! Come! Come to me, as you value your life!" rung the voice from the timbers.

He strode on.

"Come back! Come!" shouted the crowd. But he did not turn back.

A moment, and he stood over the timber whence the voice had issued.

"I'll save you, Black Phil," he said, in a trumpet voice. "I will save you, if it is in the power of man!"

"No, no! I want you on other business. Quick, time flies. This bit of paper in my pocket—take a splinter from the wood, dip it in my blood, and write as I say! Ha! the flames are coming!"

"Nay, I'll save you, Phil," and he bent to the task.

"Write, I say," thundered the man; "time flies! write, or all is lost!"

He took the paper, then a splinter from a ragged beam. Shudderingly he dipped it into the thick blood which welled from Black Phil's arm. He bent his ear, he listened, he started, he shrieked, he wrote!

"I'll sign," said Black Phil, with a last effort. He did so.

"And I'll save you, Phil, or die! I swear it!"

"Come back, come back!" shouted the wild crowd. But Lorin Gray heeded them not. Like a giant he stood, defying the flames creeping around him.

"Come back!"

He still labored on.

Then he stooped and grasped the man by the hand. One effort, and, as a loud, ringing cheer broke from his lips, Lorin Gray dragged the man from the burning timbers, far out to the line of the throng.

Then he fell from exhaustion.

But, Black Phil was dead, yet upon his person, save the wounded arm, there was no sign of bruise or cut.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. CONCLUSION.

SEVERAL hours later, when Bessie Raynor lay in her room, recovering from the effects of the accident, while Lorin Gray sat and watched her tenderly, a rap was heard at the door.

Lorin crept down and answered the summons. A sailor stood there.

"A letter from our mate to his sister," said the sailor. "I believe she lives here," and, showing the letter in Lorin's hand, he turned and strode away.

The young man looked wonderingly after him.

"Our mate to his sister," he murmured. "What can the fellow mean?" But he turned at once, and went up-stairs.

He gave the letter to Bessie.

With a little cry of mingled joy and surprise, she sat upright, and tore open the envelope, and read.

"Heaven be praised!" she cried. "The clouds are breaking, and the dawn is coming. Read this, Lorin."

He took the letter, and read as follows:

"MY DARLING SISTER:

"Our ship, the Nautilus, is just in. I have been promoted to first mate's berth a long time since. We have been very successful; but I have something strange to tell you. I found something, while at sea, in the old sea-chest father gave me. *If it is true, we*

are rich. I heard of his death on our arrival here. God rest his soul. I send this by one of our crew. I will be up in the nine o'clock train. God bless you.

"RALPH."

"Nine o'clock. 'Tis past the hour. Hal!" and Lorin paused, as another rap, at that instant, sounded on the panel.

Bessie Raynor's heart leaped to her throat, and a wild, yearning look came to her eyes. But she did not move.

A moment passed, and a loud shout of welcome sounded below. In an instant, flying feet sounded on the staircase; then the door to Bessie's room was flung open.

"Ralph!"

"Bessie!" and the long-parted brother and sister were locked in each other's arms.

Still, Ross, the cripple, whom, in the great excitement of this eventful day, everybody seemed to have forgotten, was not there.

We draw the scene on this family reunion—a reunion under such circumstances. An hour later, Bessie, her sailor brother and Lorin Gray, the hero, stood, silently, in the little front room below, in which, months before, had reposed in death the body of old Silas Raynor.

A silence, like unto the grave, pervaded the little group, as Ralph Raynor, opening an old, storm-stained sea-chest, which had just been delivered by the expressman, drew from it an ancient, threadbare pea-jacket. With trembling fingers, he opened the lining of the old garment, and drew out some faded documents.

"I found them here, in mid-ocean," he said, in a whisper almost solemn, "and my brain reeled. Look over them, Bessie, and tell me if they agree with what our dead father said to you."

The girl took them, glanced over them, and, as her brain reeled, she uttered, in a voice, just audible:

"These are the papers, Ralph. God has sent them."

A half hour passed in silence. In that time a letter had been handed to Lorin Gray, by a messenger, who said a crippled boy had begged him to deliver it. Lorin, looking on the envelope, saw his name in ink, and the following in pencil:

"DEAR BESSIE: Send this to Lorin to-day or to-night—whenver you get it."

When Lorin read the missive, he had fallen, in a swoon, to the floor.

But the time passed.

Lorin Gray suddenly bestirred himself.

"Come, Ralph—time wanes," he said. "We must be gone. I have my paper, and you yours. Let's be gone. Justice, at all hazards, must be done."

They wasted no words. Wrapping themselves in their overcoats, the young men, bidding Bessie be of good cheer, left the house.

Still Ross, the cripple, had not returned.

Arthur Ames's house was lit up in brilliant illumination, from top to bottom.

We will enter.

The spacious parlors were packed with a gay and splendid company. That company were now hushed and silent.

Before the clergyman stood Minerva Ames and Malcolm Arlington. The groom had already given in his responses, and Minerva was about answering, when a slight confusion near the door attracted the attention of all. A moment, and Lorin and Ralph made their way through the crowd.

"Hold!" said the former, in a deep voice. "Before this ceremony proceeds further, it is better the groom should know his father-in-law."

No words can describe the amazement and consternation that fell upon all.

Arthur Ames, with a white face, strode forward. He started, as his eye fell on Ralph Raynor.

"What mean you, fellow," he demanded, "by coming into my house thus? You are a poverty-stricken—"

"Hold, old man," said the young man. "Read these papers, and then tell me if I am poor," and he held the documents to which we have referred before the old banker's eyes.

One glance, and Arthur Ames reeled backward.

"'Tis false! a lie! I have it here," he exclaimed, forgetting where he was. At the same time he drew from his pocket a folded paper. "I have it here, Ralph Raynor."

He spread open the paper; but, as he did so, a deadly pallor came to his face—the paper fell from his hand, and he clutched at the mantle for support.

That paper, with the exception of five written and unsigned lines, was a blank.

"What means this, Lorin Gray?" sternly demanded Malcolm Arlington, as, dropping Minerva's hand, he strode forward and confronted the young mill-man.

"This paper will tell you; and I have a larger one, a more elaborate one, to confirm it," said young Gray, trembling despite his efforts at control.

He handed Malcolm Arlington a small piece of paper. The rich banker took it, glanced on it, and started back.

"My God! what does this mean? Do my eyes deceive me?"

Holding the paper aloft, he read the following:

"Twenty-two years ago, I and Arthur Ames plotted to murder Rutledge Ames, then nearly four years old, the son of Bernard Ames, deceased—the object, to inherit the boy's money. I flung him in the river, for money given me by Arthur Ames. But he was saved by old Moll Gray, the fortune-teller. Lorin Gray is Rutledge Ames. In my dying hour, I do him this right. This is written and signed in my own blood.

PHIL WALSH."

"'Tis false! false!" and Arthur Ames, white as a sheet, turned and fled from the room.

For a moment all was silence. Then, Malcolm Arlington, striding forward, again said, in a low voice.

"I thank you for this kindness, Rutledge Ames, as I must call you. My name has never been stained with dishonor. And"—turning to the pale-faced, haggard Minerva—"I can not now bring disgrace upon it by wedding with you. Minerva Ames, I release you—you are free!"

With a long, piercing wail, the stricken girl fell on the carpet.

We again draw the curtain on the scene.

Arthur Ames, without his overcoat, and hatless, hurried along the dark street. The moon was just creeping up into the sky and shedding its gentle beams abroad. The old banker looked not behind him. Despair was written on his brow and anguish was in his heart, as he hurried, like a madman, along. And as he went, he muttered:

"Lost! Oh! God! Lost! Everything lost!" and he still bent his stride onward.

He paid no heed to the way he was going. He cared not, for his soul was steeped in gloom and trouble, and his brain was aflame.

His foot trod on the cold boards of the eastern bridge. He suddenly started, as a small, dwarfish figure barred his way. He paused, and a shadowy fear crept over him.

"Ha! Well met! Arthur Ames!" said the person who stood in his way. "I tried to get to your house, and there brand you, murderer that you are! But I was faint; I fell by the roadside. Now we are met and I denounce you as the murderer of old Mother Moll and—"

"Hound! who are you?"

"Hound am I! I am Bessie Raynor's brother, and again I denounce you as—"

"Enough, crippled dog! Enough, you have sealed your doom!" and, in an instant, he flung himself upon the poor boy.

The struggle was an unequal one. The boy was borne back toward the low, brown parapet of the bridge.

At that instant, the moon shone brightly down.

Just as it broke through the gray cloud above, a squalid form appeared, a female form, her dress torn and burned and smelling of fire, a form tottering and reeling. A moment, and she stood by them.

"Hold! Arthur Ames! Hold! Oh! God! he is murderin' my boy, poor Ross! Stand back, man!" and she sprang forward.

"Ay, Nancy Hurd," was the cruel answer, "there he goes!" and, with an effort, he raised the boy and flung him high over the parapet into the river.

"May hell seize your foul carcass for that!" exclaimed the woman, as she flung herself on the banker.

He was a mere straw in her hands, weak, bleeding and wounded unto death, as she was. The struggle was momentary.

A moment, and as a wild shriek, like the wail of a lost soul, rung on the air, Arthur Ames fell with a splash into the dark bosom of the Merrimac. Then the moon, as if shuddering at the sight, drew again behind a passing cloud.

All was still.

That night, at twelve o'clock, on the return of the theater train from Boston, the motionless figure of a woman was noticed by the conductor to remain in the car. He approached her. To his horror, he saw that it was a woman who had got on at Lawrence, and that she was dead. When the body was removed to the police station for inquiry, what was the surprise of those engaged in searching it, to discover a large amount of gold confined to the woman's person.

Nancy Hurd had gone to her long reckoning.

We have but little more to add: we give it briefly. Lorin Gray, or Rutledge Ames, for that was his name, succeeded in time to his property, which had been appropriated by his avaricious uncle. The letter sent him by Mother Moll was a confirmation, *in extenso*, of Black Phil's dying confession.

Ralph Raynor established with the papers found in the old pea-jacket his claim to the small house in which Bessie lived. Not only that, but he journeyed out west with the old deeds, and, to his amazement, found that he and his orphan sister, by virtue of those old papers, owned property of immense value on Rush street, in Chicago. Then the directions for finding the buried doubloons were followed.

Strange to say, the spot indicated by the compass was the ground covered by Black Phil's cabin. On digging, the gold was found.

When the ruins at Mother Moll's burned house were searched, the old woman's charred corpse was found. Through the bare skull a bullet-hole had been driven. People wondered; but old Merrimac held the secret.

Months after the great accident at the mills, a skeleton, deformed and distorted, was found imbedded in the mud, on the bank of the river, far below the city.

Bessie Raynor knew that skeleton, and then, as she remembered an old-time tale of a *vision*, she wept. She thought her brother had committed suicide.

Minerva Ames soon disappeared from Lawrence. A year after her disappearance, she was seen by Bessie and Lorin (as we prefer to call him) on their bridal tour, as a principal of a religious seminary, near the Kaatskill.

She recognized them, smiled pleasantly, and then, as a tear fell from her eyes, she hurried away. But before she went, she had whispered:

"God bless you!"

She was happy; a new life was opened before her, and she was joyous in a hope that reaches beyond the grave.

Our tale is told.

THE END.

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